Social Work in Neoliberal Times: Accommodation, Resistance and Disruption

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a neo-Gramscian portrayal of hegemony as a contested process, this research explores the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia. The study identifies the varied contexts and interpretations of neoliberal hegemony, and outlines some of social work's economic, social and political responses. According to the study, neoliberal hegemony has hailed social work to a new set of relationships, centred on the 'primacy of the market' and economisation of all things. The research identifies that it has been difficult for social work to respond to neoliberal approaches. In part, neoliberal mechanisms of privatisation and marketisation have had, the research suggests, a significant economic and organisational impact on social work, which highlights a new industrial undercurrent intent on maximising workforce flexibility and financial efficiency.

The research offers evidence of the fundamental challenges to social work's identity, its social position, and its value within neoliberal society. Some aspects of neoliberalism, according to the findings, have been accommodated by social work with little challenge, while other aspects have brought on disgruntlement, or even fundamental resistance and disruption by social workers. While the manufactured 'consent' to neoliberal hegemony has significant implications for citizenship and civil society in the Australian context, the study asserts that the 'thin' hegemonic nature of neoliberalism makes its ideological domination unstable and prone to disruption. The thesis goes on to identify that elements of social work's nature, its history and its intellectual debates, not only make it resistant, but also disruptive to neoliberal hegemony, and provide possibilities for social change.

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CHAPTER 1
NEOLIBERALISM AND SOCIAL WORK

Are neoliberal times different, or do they simply represent a variation on the historical accumulative traditions of capitalism? Although neoliberalism is recognised and discussed across the globe, it remains a contested subject with a wide variety of understandings and interpretations. The fundamental contentions and rhetoric of neoliberalism about the centrality of the market, the importance of the individual, and the heralding of the private sector as the salvation of the economy are evidenced throughout society, and there are lingering concerns about its existence, its make-up, its methods and purposes. (Steger & Roy 2010; Mudge 2008a; Harvey 2005). This makes it difficult to engage with as a subject, riddled as it is with varying perceptions of its methods and ideas, and containing, as it does, contradictory elements that are often seen as confused and counter-productive. The conjecture about its real and intended objectives results in uncertainty about its claims, its activities, and its mechanisms (Mudge 2008b).

Within the literature, neoliberalism is described in a multitude of ways. It is viewed, for example, variously as an ideological misnomer, devised by critics to challenge conservative ideas (Hartwich 2009), or as little more than a logical extension of 18th Century liberalism, or, more critically, as a crude economism hiding fundamental change in the democratic state (Plant 2009). The various interpretations fuel debate about both nature and existence, raising questions about its alleged pervasiveness and the nature of its effects on individuals, organisations and society at large (Lorenz 2005; Alessandrini 2002).

Neoliberalism's historical gestation also remains unclear and elusive. As Peck (2008, p. 4) describes, it has 'no beeline trajectory to a foundational eureka moment'. Its lineage is complex and diffuse, with elements both visible and elusive at the same time, an economic "common sense" professing a strong economic rhetoric, but with highly variable applications and hidden social, political and cultural consequences. Bauman (2005), for example, argues that what we are seeing under neoliberalism is a different form of capitalist accumulation, where processes are far more 'liquid' than the predominantly 'solid' ideological structures of previous forms of capitalism. Chang (2001) contends that neoliberalism is an ideological unholy alliance, an incompatible mix of Austrian libertarianism and classical liberalism that

makes it prone to division and fracture. The strange pairing of libertarian individualism and liberal market ideology suggests a convoluted conception.

The various notions of neoliberalism identify it in structural, social, and cultural terms. Its economic manifestation is best understood as the fervent pursuit of market capitalism, restructuring market arrangements, and introducing new relations of production. Its cultural and political implications have sought to change the role of government, the nature of citizenship, and social and cultural relationships within civil society.

Neoliberalism as an idea is either foreign or confusing for many people (Crouch 2011). It does not appear as part of the everyday vernacular, nor is it prominent as a topic of general conversation. It is confusing because it extolls many things with which people can agree – freedom, choice and individual opportunity, but its consequences have often been experienced by citizens through changed, often bitter employment circumstances – the casualisation and 'off-shoring' of work, and the privatisation of services. These circumstances, rather than being attributed to the broad neoliberal policy, remain in the public view as isolated, unpopular government initiatives.

This complex amalgam of issues surrounding neoliberalism forms a central aspect of this thesis, in which I will argue that to understand neoliberalism's impact, we must examine the nature and context of neoliberal ideas and processes. While neoliberalism is often presented as asserting the economic primacy of the market, it also has broader social and cultural ramifications. These cultural implications include ways in which it has interacted with the state, civil society, and individuals. Its consequences have often reflected efforts to denigrate, devalue and dismantle democratic cultural, social and political values (Wacquant 2005; Alessandrini 2002; Bourdieu 1998).

This chapter outlines the approach and framework of the thesis, and provides a justification for the methodological approach I have taken. The later chapters provide a more detailed examination of the debates regarding neoliberal ideology and its impact. In this thesis, neoliberalism is presented as a complex, vexing, and contested set of ideas and practices that acts in contradictory and confusing ways (Barnett et al. 2008). Neoliberalism's impact, I argue, has had an influence on most aspects of Australian society, and has particular relevance for social work and its position in the contemporary context.

There continue to be wide-ranging debates about the nature, extent, and even the existence of neoliberal ideology, making it both contentious and complex as a topic. In this

thesis, the idea of neoliberalism is considered a useful construct for examining economic, political and cultural changes that have occurred within capitalism over the past 40 years. The thesis takes the view that neoliberalism contains consistent structural elements designed to advance contemporary capitalism, but that its impact and application vary spatially and culturally, and remain constricted by internal tensions. This study explores some of the ways in which neoliberalism acts to facilitate, corrupt and capture ideas, behaviours and practices for its own ends. Neoliberalism's ability to capture, disrupt and dominate reflects a ideologically promiscuous set of processes (Clarke 2005), and a somewhat parasitic project, one living off existing institutions (Peck 2011).

Neoliberalism's dominance, while reliant on control of structural and political processes, also requires it to attend to mechanisms that maintain social and cultural dominance within the public realm. It does this by constantly attending to and neutralising counterposing forces, using co-option, coercion, and the reconfiguring of contradictory ideas and practices for its own ends. The production of neoliberal hegemony is based on a continual reproduction of a publicly accepted "common sense", that involves the primacy of the market (as the right and proper place of all activity) and the centrality of the individual as a socially productive consumer within the economic market.

These neoliberal hegemonic processes of dominance, the thesis contends, reconfigure economic and political structures, and dismantle regulatory regimes that are seen to impede market capitalism, as well as the manipulation of social and cultural processes, by disrupting ideas or modifying beliefs and values to neoliberal ends. As Peck (2013) describes, neoliberalism is perhaps best seen as 'neoliberalisation', a set of processes that are continually being remade. In this process, citizens are more discretely defined as individual consumers rather than in collective social terms. I argue that these processes of consent formulation and maintenance have resulted in a high degree of variability in neoliberal projects across locations, and in the absorption of contradictory elements. Neoliberalism is paradoxical, maintaining the appearance of a dominant set of ideas and practices, but constantly wracked with confusion and conflict in its ideas and their application (Chang 2001).

The structural and economic implications of neoliberalism are viewed as central, within the thesis, to an analysis of their implications for social work in Australia. The thesis explores how neoliberal hegemony has created specific challenges to accepted social values and institutions (Garton 2009). The contradictory nature of its ideas and actions may act to

corrupt and confuse its coherence and integrity as a project. Neoliberalism's reputation of dominance and omnipotence, the thesis contends, masks weaknesses that offer opportunities for structural and cultural disruption and resistance. The magnitude of changes to many areas of life under neoliberalism, and its actions within previously uncontested, public areas of society, have resulted in confusion about the nature of society, and about the instruments and mechanisms for resolving social issues. Neoliberal actions have resulted in increasing disenfranchisement and resignation, but also disgruntlement, disruption and resistance. (Baines 2010). For social work, neoliberal changes have affected its involvement with individuals and groups, and have presented it with a raft of challenges, including to its identity and role within the welfare state, its value in the community, its position in policy development, and its connections to community groups within civil society (McDonald & Reisch 2008; Baines 2006; Ferguson & Lavalette 2006; Mendes 2003).

Drawing upon the Australian Association of Social Work's (AASW) definition of social work, the study examines how we might understand social work within a contemporary neoliberal context:

> The social work profession facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work (AASW 2013).

This definition provides a starting point for considering the position of social work and the impact of neoliberal hegemony. By drawing on the AASW definition, the study engages with a reading of critical literature and the contributions of social work educators on the impact of neoliberalism on social work in the Australian context, connecting academic understandings and research on neoliberalism with social work and the lived experiences of educators. Social work is thus understood, in this thesis, as part of the structures of the state, civil society, and neoliberal social and cultural hegemony.

Initially, I understood neoliberalism as a rather unpalatable ideology and set of practices, based on simple ideas of the application of market forces – a kind of modern Smithian economism (Smith 1904). Reflecting on my experiences of a working life as a teacher, youth worker, social worker and social work educator has given me several contextual insights into the commonalities and variations of neoliberalism across the political, cultural and spatial sectors of society. The poor outcomes for individuals that

have often accompanied neoliberal changes have also led me to an increased desire to understand how it has created, and how it maintains, its hegemony.

On the basis of my working experiences, I find it difficult to accept the idea that constructing quasi-markets and redefining people as consumers would, through some invisible force, lead to greater equality. In my analysis, the idea that complex and sophisticated social problems and structural circumstances could be resolved by market forces remains a narrow and simplistic analysis of the human condition.

My career has exposed me to the ways in which market ideologies have sought to relegate and devalue social work, and to depict professionals central to the welfare state as self-serving elites. I saw that for some workers this had led to acceptance and compliance, for others to disenchantment and frustration, and for others to a retreat into nostalgic reflections on the welfare state and its demise in Australia. My experience corresponded with the increasing difficultly for workers to understand and make sense of their position in world. My personal involvement with the topic has contributed to a more acute understanding of the issues, and to a desire to explore the relationship between neoliberal post-industrial constructs of society and the disenchantment and frustration felt by workers.

My selection of the impact of neoliberalism as a topic for research has developed from both my readings and personal insights. Working in a variety of social welfare jobs over the years has highlighted the growing disadvantage faced by individuals and groups under neoliberal change. The decimation of services and opportunities for many groups and individuals as a result of neoliberal ideas and practices presents a stark contrast with the post-war liberal welfare state. Many of the egalitarian ideals and efforts of the welfare state in Australia have been eroded or erased in these harsher, neoliberal times (Harvey 2006).

Responding to neoliberalism by taking a nostalgic view of a return to a post-war-style welfare state was, in my view, at best unlikely, and failed to contend with the changed ideological circumstances. The Australian welfare state, unlike European social democratic versions, is perhaps best described as a mixed economy of public and market structures. In Castles' (1985) view, it has, since federation, reflected a 'wage-earners' welfare state', essential as a support to private capital with limited services and public and private provision. The history of Australian public policy (Kelly 1994) rests on three

pillars: support for private capital, limited government intervention, and the pursuit of particular forms of cultural dominance.

The momentum for the creation of a private market, particularly within human services, has increased dramatically across government jurisdictions in recent years (Quiggin 1999; Marginson & Considine 2000; Wilson 2004; McDonald 2005; Horton 2007; Margison 2011; Kumar 2012; Mayo 2015). These changes reflect not just the restructuring of resources and processes of management and accountability, but are embedded, too, with a range of subtle and not-so-subtle changes in the values, ideology, structure and models for the provision of human services (Mendes 2003).

DESCRIBING THE RESEARCH

The ideas and processes of neoliberalism present challenges to social work, its ideas, practices and identity, making this a topic worthy of deeper consideration. The research draws upon critical theory to unravel neoliberalism's ideological complexities, to explore and examine its relationship with social work and its impacts, and to consider the ways in which social work has responded, as well as the possibilities for social work responses. From a critical perspective, the research sees neoliberalism as located within the context and institutional arrangements of contemporary capitalism, and as connected to the political and historical processes of globalisation.

A brief examination of the impact of neoliberalism on social work reveals two prominent institutional mechanisms: privatisation and marketisation. Together, these are designed to create expectations of the economic market as the true source of policy development. Privatisation processes have sought to shift public resources into the private market, through selling off public services, assets and resources, contracting out the provision of services, creating quasi-competitive market mechanisms, and encouraging the expansion of private for-profit (PFP) organisations. Marketisation reinforces the private market as the mechanism to establish value, the vehicle for scrutinising services, and as a way of reconstructing relationships to reflect market models of profit, accountability and sustainability (Carey 2008a). The effect has been a reconfiguring of public organisations to look and act like commercial entities, and to pursue management and efficient use of resources as the central tasks of organisations in improving the power of the market.

Neoliberal ideology challenges essential elements of social work's mission. As this study reveals, its effects resonate with many aspects of social work's social and political project in Australia. This can be observed in the restructuring of social work job roles and skills, the redefining of organisational processes, in changed relationships between citizens and social work, and in the restructuring of professional knowledge (Leonard 2001). The result, the study concludes, is that neoliberalism has sought to alter aspects of social work's identity and role within civil society as part of new industrial, social and political processes. The consequences of these changes have significance for social work's legitimacy, and for its ongoing position as a socio-political project.

Seeking to understand the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia has significant methodological implications. The discrete and limited nature of this study on such a wide-ranging, apparently omnipresent but difficult to define topic, makes it fraught with methodological tensions. The limited scale of such a research offering, and one with limited resources, creates challenges. Confining the project to a discrete cohort of respondents and to a particular context goes some way to ensuring that the data can be considered useful to understanding neoliberalism's impact. Clearly it would have been an easier task, both intellectually and methodologically, to constrain the topic to a more discrete aspect and/or location of neoliberalism's effects. The study is committed to developing a broad political and cultural analysis, in part on the basis of a desire to consider how neoliberalism has affected social work in both macro and micro ways. The approach used in the study was intended to develop mechanisms to draw together broad neoliberal ideas, practices, contexts, and the lived experiences of key informants in ways that might explain both the structural nature and the 'liquidity' of neoliberal processes. While some aspects, such as privatisation and marketisation, are prominent, there remain aspects of neoliberalism's impact on social work that are less visible.

A NEO-GRAMSCIAN APPROACH

A critical theoretical approach offers the benefit of developing a politically active and emancipatory inquiry that is useful in developing an account of the impact of ideological hegemony. Critical theory provides a strong analysis of the structures of social relations and how they oppress individuals and groups within the social order (Harvey 1990). A critical theory approach provides the possibility of understanding the structural nature of capitalism,

its historical and material manifestations, and its inherent contradictions (Geuss 1987). As a theoretical approach, it provides a framework in which to examine the changes that have occurred in contemporary capitalism (Malpas & Wake 2006; McGregor 2003), and, I contend, is useful as an approach to analyse the impact of neoliberalism on social work. A critical approach offers the possibility of a praxis being formed from the combination of structural understandings and lived experience accounts.

Neo-Marxist structural accounts provide insight and clarity about the nature of capitalist accumulation, and the processes of oppression inherent in it. Drawing on Gramscian ideas of cultural hegemony, the study has sought to examine the contested nature of neoliberal consent and its ways of maintaining its hegemony.

What has arisen often during the exploration of this topic has been the significant variance in the way in which neoliberalism has taken hold in different nation states, different communities, and across sectors within those states. What appeared initially to me to be simply local variability, I have come to understand as variances and distortions reflecting a more fundamental and marked influence on not only the type of neoliberalism present, but also the intensity and nature of its impact. This variability at first led me to consider a neo-Marxian approach that offered well-developed structural accounts of ideology and capitalism. While Marxist accounts offered a theoretical way of analysing neoliberalism, they also appeared to be limited in their ability to explain this variability in neoliberalism's expansion and impact. The limited possibility for the involvement of individual agency and cultural representations in challenging a dominant ideology and overcoming oppression in these accounts became an important consideration.

My reading has led me to consider the ideas of Antonio Gramsci (1971), an Italian Marxist who, while maintaining the importance of a structural analysis of capitalism, offers a more active role for citizens in fighting oppression. In his account, class dominance is manufactured through a process of consent-making which he describes as leading to a 'cultural hegemony' (Simon 1991). From a Gramscian perspective, the state acts to develop the allegiance of individuals to the dominant ideology, its ideas, beliefs and actions, and to control dissent. In this way, the consent of individuals to a dominant ideology is constructed within civil society through the instruments of the state (Morton 2007).

Drawing on Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, Althusser (1972) considered the relationship between structure and cultural reproduction as pivotal in the maintenance of a

dominant ideology within society. Ideology, in Althusser's account, performs both structural and cultural functions. On the one hand, it maintains the dominance of capitalism's ideas and processes, and on the other, it conscripts the individual to contribute to the maintenance of its dominance through their consent and active participation. For Althusser (1972), the maintenance and strengthening of dominant ideas occurred through individuals being drawn to roles and ideas already established within society, a process he describes as 'hailing' or interpellation.[1]

This research draws on Gramscian ideas of cultural hegemony to make sense of the way in which ideology is formed and reformed, maintained and contested. The active nature of hegemonic contestation means that consent is never assured, thus requiring constant adaptation, coercion and manipulation. This creates social processes that require citizens to contend with, and adapt to, changed circumstances, but also provides opportunity for disruption and resistance within the processes that maintain consent. The thesis also draws on Althusser's interpretation of the way in which individuals are drawn into ideological processes through being 'hailed' or interpellated into dominant ideas.

Althusser's notion of interpellation advances the idea that ideological dominance is not simply imposed on individuals, but in fact advanced and maintained by individuals contributing to the hegemony, often against their own best interests. Althusserian interpellation encourages a more complex analysis of the interplay between structural and cultural elements of neoliberal ideology, and provides a unique insight into its impact. This study maintains that neoliberal ideological hegemony rests upon the active and passive compliance of individuals – but it is never assured, it is constantly forming and reforming, and always susceptible to counter forces.

[1] Althusser described interpellation like this: imagine you are called out to by a policeman in the street. You immediately conjure up images of your role in relation to authority, and your response mirrors the way in which you are interpellated into a role within society. He describes this process as not one of learning the role but one that was 'always already'.

RESEARCH AIMS

This study sets out to explore the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia, and the challenges and possibilities for social work as an emancipatory project. The aims of the research are:

- To examine the nature and processes of neoliberalism as a hegemonic project in Australian social work education, and
- To analyse how Australian social work educators understand the possibilities for an emancipatory critical response to the impact of neoliberal hegemony in Australian social work.

The study, drawing upon open-ended interviews with 15 social work educators from Universities on Australia's eastern seaboard and a selection of critical literature, explores the impact of neoliberal hegemony, its structural implications, and its cultural and social impacts in the context of social work in Australia. It explores the ways in which aspects of common consent are formed and maintained, the changed institutional mechanisms of the state and civil society, and the way that cultural aspects of identity and relationships have been altered.

In recognising the impact of neoliberal ideas and processes on the ways in which the individual, the state, social values and professional knowledge have been understood, the study also examines the implications for Australian social work ideas and practices. The research project has been constructed using a qualitative methodology drawn from ideas of critical ethnography (Harvey 1990). Uncovering the impact of neoliberal ideas and practices on social work in Australia forms part of a project that also seeks to highlight the possibility of critical emancipatory responses to neoliberalism. While social work educators are positioned differently from social work practitioners, their insights about ways of responding to neoliberalism will prove to be unique and valuable.

The thesis has used research questions as a qualitative mechanism to garner a broad range of responses rather than just providing a descriptive account. They have acted as a starting point for the development of contributor accounts, and have developed as a process of exploration of their ideas and perspectives. The research has been directed toward two major themes: the impact of neoliberalism on social work in an Australian context; and the ways in which social workers in Australia have understood the advance of neoliberalism.

DEVELOPING A CRITICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Developing a critical research methodology requires, in Harvey's (1990, p. 1) analysis, an effort to 'dig beneath the surface of historically specific oppressive social structures'. The essence of this approach to research is inductive in seeking out the contradictions inherent in social structures and processes, and by way of dialectical analysis distilling new knowledge. An important element of any research is achieving consistency between its aims, the theoretical approach and the methodology. Being aware of the overwhelming nature of the topic, I have drawn together a number of elements in constructing a critical methodological approach. The study is underpinned by a commitment to the value of a critical theoretical and methodological approach, based on what Harvey (1990) describes as methods that get below the surface and examine oppression in greater detail. One of the key endeavours has been to develop a research methodology that challenges the structures, processes and actions of oppression and provides an analysis that gives opportunity for social change.

The research methodology is explored in more detail in Chapter 4, which outlines the elements of a critical ethnographic approach. A critical ethnographic method of inquiry was also chosen because of its value in capturing diverse and complex qualitative data. There is recognised value in developing a dialectical approach to the gathering and analysis of data in complex ideological circumstances (Thomas 1993). A dialectical approach is considered of particular value in this study as it offers the ability to explore the implications of the spatial variability and range of neoliberalism's impact, and to examine the contested nature of its implications across social work contexts. It is considered essential within a critical research approach that methodological processes work to uncover structural and individual processes of oppression and disadvantage from a range of perspectives (Madison 2005). It is also incumbent upon those undertaking critical research to act in ways that encourage the development of possibilities for social change, both theoretically and methodologically.

Critical ethnography is used in this study as a qualitative methodology that seeks to maintain a critical concern for issues of power and position when exploring the intellectual understandings and the lived experiences of social work educators, and while examining the academic literature (Denzin 1997). In Chapter 4, I detail the theoretical considerations of this methodology, and explain the methods and limitations of critical ethnography in this study.

Central to this critical ethnographic study was its ability to draw together ideas and lived experiences across a range of contexts, and as such the study draws on both the

experiences and ideological perspectives of 15 social work educators from universities on Australia's eastern mainland seaboard, and on the critical literature that surrounds neoliberalism. In developing the study, a range of data sources were considered. Developing a narrative that enabled both the lived experiences and the intellectual and ideological concerns of neoliberalism to be aired was considered a primary issue. Data that exposed the everyday implications of neoliberalism, as well as the ideological convolutions and the historical and political processes of its project, were considered particularly beneficial.

While there were a range of possible interview sources, including practising social workers, policy professionals and consumers, it was felt that social work educators could provide a useful data source because of their experiences of social work from a number of positions. The narrative produced from the critical academic literature and the understandings and experiences of social work educators has been constructed as an in-depth account of neoliberalism and its impact on social work and social work education in Australia.

Potential contributors were identified from the Schools of Australian Social Work directory, available from the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) website. Social work educators were invited to participate in interviews at their choice of location. The data developed from the experiences, knowledge and theoretical understandings of social work educators was gained through interviews conducted at various locations along the east coast of mainland Australia.

The data within the study comprises of a composite narrative constructed from interviews conducted with social work educators on their ideas and experiences, and a body of critical literature on neoliberalism, its impact and its relation to social work. The literature offers various critical theoretical interpretations of neoliberalism, as well as examples of its impact across a range of sectors in society. The literature focused on the impact of neoliberalism on social work was drawn from both international and Australian contexts.

The composite narrative is a way of making visible the experiences of individuals and groups, academic critiques of neoliberal hegemonic ideas, and practices and hidden aspects of neoliberal ideology. Interviewing social work educators has provided an opportunity to expose some of those little seen aspects of the impact of neoliberalism on social work. The small number of interviewees, and the restrictions of time and resources, limit the reach of the inquiry, but the research still contributes to a deeper understanding of the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia.

Gaining a useful understanding of this impact has significant methodological implications, and presents a challenge to developing a broad political and cultural analysis. While the study could have confined itself to a more discrete aspect of social work, or to a particular location or circumstance of social work practice, it was felt that to try to draw a larger landscape across social work and social work education in Australia would be beneficial.

Neo-Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony have been used to analyse neoliberalism in a way that engages with a structural perspective, and with political and cultural ideas and mechanisms. As a method, it has been employed to create a social and cultural narrative of the impact of neoliberal hegemonic processes both 'upon' and 'within' social work in Australia. Exploring cultural hegemonic processes affords a way of examining the structural and lived experiences of neoliberalism, enabling an examination of its broad contexts, uncovering its anomalies, and illuminating the experiences of individuals. This research project uses a critical ethnographic methodology as a form of praxis to create a dialectical critical theoretical approach that provides a depth of understanding of neoliberal hegemonic processes.

The methodological intent of the research is to extract data that canvass multiple sources. Fifteen contributors to the study were sought on the basis of their positioning and ability to respond to broad aspects and experiences of neoliberalism, both intellectually and in everyday life. In Chapter 4, this rationale is explored, and its strengths and weaknesses outlined. While early consideration was given to interviewing practising social workers, it was decided to draw on the experiences of Australian social work educators from universities in the eastern mainland of Australia. The circumstances of educators allow them to discuss both the academic and intellectual discussions about neoliberalism and the experiences of working in higher education, as well as their connection to social work and to the state and civil society. Their positioning thus gives educators a uniquely wide-ranging perspective.

The process of developing a research methodology within a theoretical milieu raises concerns about choosing an 'intact' theoretical perspective as a method of analysis. Creating an authentic account challenges the researcher not to 'fit the data' to a predetermined set of ideas. Various critical theoretical perspectives are visible within the study, and accounts vary considerably in terms of how the issues are perceived both within the literature and by educators. A neo-Gramscian approach was used not for its definitive methodological approach, but rather as a way of analysing the social, cultural and political process of

neoliberalism. The diversity of theoretical approaches offered by social work educators not only provides visible ways of examining neoliberal hegemony, but also of exposing the complexity of social work's situation. The study has therefore welcomed a variety of perspectives and has sought to explore the key debates surrounding neoliberalism around a number of themes. The ways in which educators understand social work as accommodative of neoliberalism, and how it has resisted and disrupted neoliberal ideas and practices, are drawn from these individual accounts.

The evolving narrative within this thesis is formed around social work educators understanding of neoliberalism and social work, and their position within it and outside it. It explores the ways in which social work has moved/been coerced into accommodating, disrupting and/or resisting neoliberal advances. In some ways, this study reveals that social work has sought to avoid the excesses of neoliberalism, has resisted and disrupted elements of its advance, but has also contributed to neoliberal hegemony.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis follows a conventional structure. This chapter explains the personal and political motivations that have influenced the choice of subject, and provides a brief introduction to the historical and ideological contexts of neoliberalism. It has given an outline of the aims and justifications for the study, and has explained briefly the evolution of the research project in light of the centrality of a critical approach. The nature of its neoliberalism's positioning has been discussed through the debates about its ideological framework and impact.

Chapter 2 offers a more detailed exploration of neoliberal ideas and practices that apply across a range of contexts, including social work. Neoliberalism is considered a contentious issue with a variety of interpretations. Drawing on a range of critical ideas and perspectives, Chapter 2 examines the ways in which neoliberalism might be understood in order to frame an approach to the analysis of its political and cultural nature as a project. Drawing on a range of sources and conceptual approaches, the chapter expands on the contested nature of neoliberalism's ideological claims. This is exposed as a key site for not only examining neoliberal hegemony but also for providing dimension to an examination of its impacts. Neoliberalism is considered not just as a new ideological project, but also as a historical development of previous forms of capitalism. The second chapter provides a brief introduction to a range of interpretations of neoliberalism and its impact, and this forms the

basis for the analysis of critical responses in the second half of the thesis. Understanding the fractures and flaws of neoliberal development, I will argue, exposes the incomplete and conflicted nature of its ideas and practices.

The use of a critical theoretical approach as a rationale for exploring neoliberalism is examined in Chapter 3. There, I argue that a critical approach provides the kind of inductive research methodology that is most valuable in exploring neoliberalism as an ideology intertwining economic structures, political processes and individual lives. The research draws upon neo-Gramscian understandings of the ways in which capitalism develops and maintains a cultural hegemony. These processes, at the heart of Gramscian ideas of 'cultural hegemony', are applied to the way in which neoliberalism has developed and maintained its social and political consent.

Chapter 3 expands upon the ideas of Gramsci, and the Althusserian concept of 'interpellation' (refined in Hay 1995), as a way of understanding neoliberal hegemonic processes. An examination of the literature provides diverse assumptions and explanations about neoliberal development, its dominance, and its effects on social work.

Chapter 4 draws on a selection of academic literature on the impact of neoliberalism, canvassing both the ways in which we might understand its influence and examining something of neoliberalism's effect across broad sectors of societies and nation states. I also give a brief introduction to the relationship between contemporary globalisation and neoliberalism and the way in which contemporary capitalism has affected both social institutions and social relations.

In Chapter 5, I outline the methodology and detail the decision-making processes and dilemmas encountered as part of the research process. The chapter develops the rationale for the study, and gives a more detailed account of the reasons for the use of a critical ethnographic approach and its practical implications for the study. The chapter goes on to outline the methods of data gathering and analysis, including an explanation and justification of the ways in which the data has been constructed and analysed, and also the choices regarding sources, interview methods, and methods of analysis.

Drawing on neo-Gramscian ideas of cultural hegemony, Chapter 6 examines the methods by which social work has been hailed (or interpellated) into a market ideology as part of neoliberal hegemony. The chapter looks at ways in which social work in Australia has been drawn into neoliberal methods of gaining and maintaining its hegemony. The chapter

reflects on the commonalities between sectors and disciplines, particularly within the professions, in developing and maintaining dominance, and explores something of social work's naivety in understanding neoliberal methods. Beiler and Morton (2004) identify three domains that are useful in forming an analysis of the impact of neoliberalism. They argue that an understanding of the relations of production, including in the industrial sphere and social relations that maintain neoliberal hegemony and the relationships crafted within the state and civil society, are central to understanding hegemony and how it is maintained. In this study, contributors have clearly identified that neoliberal ideas and actions have influenced social work in Australia, but they give differing accounts of the ways in which social work should respond.

Social work's response to neoliberalism's impact, as the study outlines, has occurred in multiple ways. The thesis contends that social work has sought to accommodate neoliberal ideas and practices, but also to resist some of its ideas and practices. Social work has also provided a disruptive critique of neoliberal hegemonic processes through its own disruptive actions and ideas. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the ways in which social work has sought to respond to neoliberalism. The focus in Chapter 7 is on the way in which social work in Australia has sought to accommodate neoliberalism, either intentionally or by accident. The processes by which social work has accommodated neoliberal ideas and practices are explored, as well as the implications of social work's complicity in advancing a neoliberal agenda.

Chapter 8 examines in more detail how Australian social work has resisted and disrupted neoliberal hegemony. Drawing on Beiler and Morton's (2004) domains of hegemony, the chapter examines how social work has sought to resist neoliberal ideas and practices. The study reveals that, while there have been acts of resistance, they have often been isolated and individual in nature. The chapter explores the way in which social work has sought to disrupt neoliberalism. This, the contributors identify, provides a range of ways in which social work contains disruptive elements that can affect neoliberal practices. As shown in Chapter 8, some interviewees suggest that this makes social work more difficult to contain within the neoliberal hegemony.

The aims of the research and the themes of the analysis are revisited in Chapter 9. The implications for social work of neoliberal hegemony are summarised, and there is a discussion of the key issues identified and developed within the study. The chapter goes on to examine ways in which social work might advance an emancipatory response to

neoliberalism, and also identifies the study's limitations, both intellectually and methodologically, and considers the possibilities and benefits of further research.

SIGNIFICANCE

While the aim of this research is to contribute to the knowledge and debate regarding the impact of neoliberalism on social work in the Australian context, it also endeavours to contribute to a greater understanding of neoliberal hegemony and the possibilities of resistance for social workers (Ferguson 2008; Garrett 2014). The topic of neoliberalism has attracted significant academic attention, and concern about its impact is demonstrated across many disciplines. For the purposes of this study, a broad range of critical literature on neoliberalism and its impact has been examined. Much of this relates to ways in which neoliberal ideas might be understood theoretically, but also explores neoliberalism's impact across disciplines and geographic locations. A more discrete critical literature has formed the basis for the development of a data narrative, which has sought to align the literature with contributors' responses.

One of the benefits of a study such as this is its exploration of neoliberalism both in structural and cultural terms, and its examination of how its common elements combine in multi-faceted process that are affected by spatial variation, and political, social and cultural context in its efforts to maintain dominance.

Further, the study argues that analysing the ways in which neoliberal processes of forming and maintaining hegemony is important in understanding social work's position and identity within the neoliberal project. While in the past social work has been inherently tied to its position within a post-industrial/post-Keynesian social order, the rise of neoliberal ideas of privatisation, individualisation and marketisation inherently question social work's involvement, complicity, and potential as an emancipatory project.

Exposing the flaws within neoliberal ideas and actions, it is suggested, provides an opportunity to examine social work's potential to contribute to a counter-hegemony. This thesis argues that a detailed exploration of neoliberalism's impact on and within social work in Australia will go some way to providing greater clarity about social work's accommodation, resistance and disruption of neoliberal hegemony. While there is a significant literature, including within social work, on the impact of neoliberal ideas and processes that examines the common aspects of organisational change and its implications for

practice, its variable presence and application remains somewhat underexplored in the Australian social work context.

Significantly, this study examines the ways in which social work has been influenced by neoliberal ideas. Neoliberalism, the thesis contends, has used privatisation, marketisation and consumer individualisation as mechanisms to coerce, corrupt, and co-opt Australian social work to neoliberal social ideals. I argue that, while many of these changes have been foisted upon social work in Australia, social work has in fact contributed to neoliberal hegemony at times through its accommodation of neoliberal ideas and practices. The processes of neoliberal hegemonic formation have not, however, been completely successful, with evidence showing Australian social work's resistance and disruption of its project through the advancement of critical ideas and forms of practice. This thesis seeks to encourage further interest, debate and awareness of neoliberalism's complex impact, and to enhance the possibilities of an emancipatory critical social work response to neoliberal hegemony.

CONCLUSION

This chapter reflects both my commitment to the topic and my belief that neoliberalism has done much to disadvantage citizens. I have outlined my interest in the topic and the search for a more sophisticated form of analysis that enables a deeper understanding of neoliberal hegemony and its effects. I have outlined the broad scope of the project, and given a brief account of the approach and its reasoning, as well as an argument for the research's value.

This chapter has established the basic reasoning behind the choice of a critical theoretical and methodological approach to the study, and has provided an explanation of the value of considering neoliberalism in a broader cultural, social and political context. The analytical approach has been briefly outlined, seeking to introduce both the argument for a critical appraisal of neoliberalism, and putting the case for a neo-Gramscian approach that affords a way of exploring the cultural and political nature of neoliberal hegemony. Neoliberalism is best understood, I argue, as both an economic ideology and a cultural and political project. Its ideas have sought to dominate structures and political forms, to alter beliefs, ideas and processes, and to fundamentally change relationships across all sectors of society.

The chapter has also briefly discussed the research design, including its theoretical underpinnings and methodological approach. An introduction to the chapter's methodology outlines that it has been approached as a way of creating a synergy between the research methods, data and the topic to create a sophisticated analysis. In summary, the focus of the chapter has been to give the reader an outline of the context and rationale for the study and of the theoretical and methodological approach to the research, as well as of my positioning as a researcher.

The chapter has established a context for understanding neoliberalism as a complex but deeply flawed ideological and political project whose impact across society, including on social work, has been neither simple nor consistent. The ability of social work to respond to neoliberalism, I argue, requires an understanding of its project, including its confusions and contradictions. In this research project, I have taken the view that even a small study it provides the opportunity to examine and analyse the complexities of neoliberalism, its discourses, practices and identities, within the Australian social work landscape. The thesis contends that the possibilities and mechanisms for social change are based on a detailed analysis of neoliberalism's history and trajectory. While this is a broad and complex topic, with multiple expressions across a variety of contexts, and its effects both within and upon social work in Australia are extremely difficult to capture, the study seeks to reflect the interrelation of these issues – something which would not have been possible had the study covered a more discrete topic.

The possibilities for challenging neoliberalism for social work in Australia and contributing to processes that bring about social change that this research project identifies are contingent on an analysis that draws on critical ideas across a broad spectrum and connects these with lived experiences of neoliberalism's impact. The thesis contends that neoliberalism can be critically understood in a variety of ways, but draws on an examination centred on its mechanisms of hegemonic dominance. These are presented as a disruptive and resistant set of processes, spatially variable and changeable, a dominant ideology formed from a fragile consent and based on structural economic and political institutional mechanisms. The research goes on to identify that the very disruptive, contorted and variable elements of neoliberal hegemony make it in some ways vulnerable. The study identifies that aspects of social work's commitment to critical ideas and historical and practice approaches lie beyond neoliberalism's reach, and offer potential as part of a resistive and disruptive

counter-hegemony. In this way, the research seeks to link the possibilities of social work to new endeavours of social change.

CHAPTER 2
VEXING AND PERPLEXING NEOLIBERALISM[2]

Neoliberalism is complex and multi-faceted, and it can be understood from a variety of vantage points (Harvey 2005). Various theoretical perspectives provide particular insights into aspects of neoliberalism's genealogy, ideological assertiveness, fragility and resilience (Harvey 2006; Ong 2006; Clarke 2007; Peck 2013). In this chapter, I argue that an understanding of the ideological nature and historical development of neoliberalism is a necessary precursor to an examination of its impact. Although neoliberalism has no clear lineage, it does have historical vestiges that give insight into its contemporary manifestations, and into its limitations (Harvey 2005). I will draw upon some of the variety of intellectual interpretations of neoliberalism to illuminate spatial, economic, political and social understandings of its development and continuity.

The historical and ideological exploration of neoliberalism in this chapter forms the basis for developing the theoretical framework for the study, developed in Chapter 4. The thesis takes the position that neoliberalism, from a critical perspective, has developed a political project designed to reconfigure relationships within contemporary capitalism. Understanding neoliberalism's genealogy, the breadth of its reach and its diverse application, the thesis contends, is a necessary precursor to analysing the nature and dimensions of its impact on social work in Australia.

As a set of economic ideas and processes of advanced capitalism, neoliberalism has grown in prominence since the 1970s, when it was initially described in popular literature as 'economic rationalism'. It has always invited a wide range of interpretations, from being a contemporary application of the laissez faire capitalism of old (Hartwich 2009), to representations which see it as a significant shift from, a political and economic hardening of, previous iterations of capitalism (Boas & Morse 2009).

The idea of neoliberalism as a new form of capital accumulation is reflected by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007), in their examination of the historical development of capitalism, from family dynasties, to rational hierarchal management and organisations, and a

[2] 'Perplexing' is used in this context to describe an ideology that appears with many faces and contours, is locationally variable, and adaptable to contradictory ideas for its own purposes.

new form of ‘connectionist’ or ‘network’ construction. This historical analysis encourages a deeper understanding of what might be different about this new form of capital accumulation. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism contains common economic and structural elements (the primacy of the market, individual responsibility and an acquiescent state), but rather than interpreting these as its defining principles, he suggests it is difficult to portray neoliberalism a unified set of economic ideas.

The structural consequences of neoliberalism are evident in everyday life, where citizens contend with new industrial frameworks, and with a changed relationship between the state and citizens. These changes have been very evident within the Australian context, where successive governments have touted the sanctity of the market and neoliberal structural changes. This has resulted, in Australia, in social and cultural implications which form the particular interest of this chapter. Attention is paid to the way neoliberal values and processes have sought to create a pervasive hegemony across all aspects of contemporary Australian society. Understanding something of its social and political implications as an ideology allows us to view the way in which it has sought to redefine social and political elements of society using cultural processes of capture, co-option and coercion (Peck 2011).

To tease out the interwoven strands of neoliberal hegemonic relationships requires analysis of its relationships to work, capitalism and the globalisation of capital.

Neoliberalism, its ideas and practices have been a subject of increasing interest since the 1990s, with a considerable body of literature that expands across a broad spectrum of disciplines being the result (see, for example, Mitchell 2001; McLaren & Farahmandpur 2001; Horton 2007; Hill 2009; Marginson 2011; Kumar 2012; Peck 2013; Cahill 2014; Humpage 2015, Whyte & Wiegratz 2016). In the general community, where its ideas remain somewhat elusive and mysterious, neoliberalism is not a part of the everyday vernacular. For many people, what they have experienced is its impacts through the reduction of services and community resources, the shifting of services from public to private organisations, and through new industrial patterns and structures in the workplace (Alessandrini 2002; Baines 2006). This has created general concern and anxiety, often framed in oppositional debates pitting the value of public services against the need for personal responsibility (Birch 2015).

The diverse experiences of what are claimed to be neoliberal activities highlight their historical variability, in application and across contexts (Barnett et al. 2008). As a set of ideas, neoliberalism has, over a period of at least forty years, been able to survive and even

regenerate its project. This ability to survive, reconstruct itself and continue, even against significant opposition, marks it as an ideology of a different form, with a remarkable ability to ingest and accommodate ideas for its own purposes (Crouch 2011). It has been able to sustain a mesmerising logic through re-imagining institutions into new forms, and refurbishing organisational processes as essentially economically market-driven.

While the ideas of neoliberalism appear to have survived over a considerable time, and its claims of dominance as a set of economic and political ideas are accepted in many quarters, it is however not an ideology without flaws and weaknesses. Its internal and external fissures and pressures suggest its vulnerability and discordancy as an ideological project, according to Peck (2013). In this regard, this thesis pursues the nature of neoliberal ideology, its history, is flaws, vagaries and variability, to examine its fragility and its dexterity of appearing as a coherent ideology with a consistent socio-political shape, and at the same time its nature as a conflicted, fragile spatial project (Peck 2011). I argue in this thesis that neoliberal hegemony is externally changeable by alternative ideas and internally compromised by ideological conflicts. This has meant that its efforts to dominate through the 'common sense of the market' has required it to adapt to contradictory ideas (Clarke 2008) that require continual efforts to stabilise its project. In Peck's (2002) view, this makes it a somewhat stumbling ideology, prone to fracture and compromise, an ideology clinging to dominance by 'failing forward' in its efforts to maintain its hegemony.

NEOLIBERALISM'S IDEOLOGICAL PROJECT

An analysis of the literature on neoliberalism confirms an array of assumptions and interpretations that offer quite different views of its nature and implications (Jessop 2003; Harvey 2005; Hall 2011). One of the difficulties of neoliberalism as a concept, according to, Peck (2011), is its multiple usages across both the public and disciplinary vernaculars, to the point where, as a concept, it can become simultaneously meaningless and 'all things to all people'. Jessop (2003) contends that the term loses usefulness when all things are claimed to be within its reach. Peck and Tickell (2002) similarly argue that the proliferation of accounts of neoliberalism in which everything is assumed to operate under neoliberal principles does not account for other influencing factors, such as cultural and political structures and motivations.

Thorson and Lie (2009), for example, question whether neoliberalism is really an all-encompassing ideology that shapes behaviour and activity within institutions. Neoliberalism's 'capture of all things' raises debate about whether it is a valuable concept, and/or whether it even exists. Brenner and Theodore (2002) consider the issue of actually existing regimes of neoliberal hegemony and conclude that, while there are commonalities between examples, they vary considerably in their application. Steger (2010) argues that as a concept it has been susceptible to abuse and manipulation, and Bell (2011, p. 140) suggests that a focus on 'actually existing' neoliberalism challenges the conception of neoliberalism as an overarching ideology. The discernible question becomes whether purported examples of neoliberalism are accurate expressions of it as an existing phenomenon, given its often high degree of variability and the lack of agreement about some of its elements (Birch 2015). Others take the view that neoliberalism has become more rhetorical, rather than having a clear ideological value. Critically, Steger and Roy (2010, p. xi) claim that it has become an 'opaque catchphrase invented by radical academics or reactionary economic nationalists for the purpose of downgrading the intellectual achievements of neoclassical economists'.

While debates about differentiating between real and imagined elements of neoliberalism make the concept of a unified definition illusionary, Gamble (2009) offers the view that attempting to define neoliberalism as a unified concept is flawed of itself, arguing that as an ideology it remains open to the infiltration of all kinds of assumptions about its nature and claims about its uses and misuses.

Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010) argue that neoliberalism can best be viewed in variegated terms, and that attempting to view it as always the same is ill-advised. Similarly, Steger and Roy (2010) suggest that divergence within neoliberal experience is more common than conformity, and that the evidence suggests the existence of neoliberalism in different forms and different ways. The proffering of the idea of neoliberalism as an omnipresent project, with supposedly all manner of incarnations and applications, Peck and Tickell (2002), suggest it is a political theory confection, a loose gathering together of a range of somewhat unrelated aspects.

Stuart Hall (2011) writes that 'neoliberal' is not a satisfactory term, for it acts as a grab bag of diverse elements and attempts to reduce a range of complexities of localism, geo-politics and history into a single form. He concludes, however, that 'there are enough common features to warrant giving it a provisional conceptual identity, provided this is understood as a first approximation' (Hall 2011, p. 705). Hall (2011) resolves the question of

neoliberalism's legitimacy as a concept by arguing that although it might not be considered possible to unify it into a single definitional construct, it is however useful as a way of identifying and conceptualising a collection of common features, exploring ideological similarities, and examining differences and consequences.

In Hall's (2011) view, the value of neoliberalism as a concept rests not with its empirical definition but with its ability to allow a more detailed scrutiny of the diverse complexity of ideas, geo-politics, history and identity. Drawing on Hall's (2011) analysis, this research has sought to develop a case for examining neoliberalism more fully as a set of hegemonic processes. The thesis argues that neoliberalism as an idea has currency not in its quantifiable representations, but in the manner in which hegemonic processes reconfigure structures and relationships of production, industrial relations, personal responsibility and citizenship, and the role of the state. The variability of what constitutes the 'neoliberal' acts as a valuable point of departure for exploring its diverse explanations and understandings, and its impact.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY

Understanding the historical context of neoliberal ideology is important, because it not only provides a way of documenting the direction and change of its project, but also provides a point of analysis of its nature. This thesis draws on Birch's (2015, p. 573) analysis that neoliberalism requires 'untangling [of] its complex and diverse intellectual and political history'.

While neoliberalism as an ideology has a fragile and unclear historical lineage – it is without a clear moment of origin – it does contain historical elements that reveal some degree of lineage (Peck 2008). The idea of a public economy, of a 'market', can be traced to ancient times; it is found in early Christianity, in European trade of the 16th Century, and in colonisation throughout the Third World in more recent centuries. Liberalist ideas from the 18th Century, including Adam Smith's (1904) account of market liberalism outlined in *The Wealth of Nations,* argue for the centrality of the economic market as a natural organising principle of society. In Smith's view, the economic market was self-correcting, and would always act in the interests of society's members as if it were an 'invisible hand'. Economic equilibrium was, in Smith's (1904) view, natural to the relationship between the processes of acquisition and of consumption.

These liberal ideas became influential, and propelled capitalism in the early part of the 19th Century, but fell from favour following economic crises and depression in the late 1890s and 1920s, which savaged belief in market capitalism (Bordo, Taylor & Williamson 2003). In response, new ideologies emerged and gained prominence, favouring central planning or state intervention in capitalist markets (Cockett 1995).

From the 1930s, conservative economists promoted ideas that reflected liberalist ideas of the supremacy of the market. Early attempts culminated in the formation of a group to promote a new liberal economics at a meeting in 1947 at the Hotel du Parc at Mont Pelerin, Switzerland. While this heralded an agenda to revitalise liberalist traditions, they remained a relatively isolated and incidental group with a collection of ideas out of favour in the period of post-war growth and a general desire for a Keynesian 'embedded liberalism' (Lilley 2010). The promotion of the idea of an efficient market economy centred on individual responsibility and a rejection of these state interventions creates a link between liberalism of the 18th Century and contemporary neoliberalism (Bonefeld 2012).

The embedded liberalism of the post-war era that had produced sustained economic growth was, by the mid-1970s, threatened by rising levels of inflation and unemployment, creating economic stagnation (Watts 1987). Keynesian economic ideas of the post-war period, which had provided the impetus for a socially responsible capitalist state, combining social welfare provision and economic accumulation, were viewed as incapable of dealing with what was considered a crisis of capitalism (Mendes 2003). The changed economic circumstances in the latter days of the last century provided the opportunity to challenge the basic principles of Keynesian interventionist economics (Harvey 1990).

For conservative economists, such as von Mises (1949), Hayek (1944) and Friedman (1984), the climate of economic recession represented an 'historic moment' that challenged both the economic and social ideas of embedded liberalism. This challenge, characterised as the 'crisis of the welfare state', was founded on the idea that Keynesian interventionist economics had provided no remedy for the economic circumstances. In Giddens' (1990) view, the crisis of Keynesian economics represented a changing economic and social epoch, and a triumph of new ideas of capital accumulation. In the Australian context, the crisis of the welfare state has often centred on an essentially economic interpretation, identifying a loss of faith in the social democratic consensus that underpins the welfare state and the failure of Keynesian interventionist economics (Castles 1985; McDonald & Marston 2006).

Taylor-Gooby (2009), for example, views the demise of Keynesian ideas quite differently, believing that the death of embedded liberalism was largely the result of an orchestrated effort by capitalist elites. The efforts to contain capitalism through industrial reform and the democratisation of social institutions had, by the 1970s, incurred a backlash from ruling elites. The faltering economic circumstances of the 1970s (considered to be due in part to the energy crisis) created the impetus for new economic arrangements. As capital accumulation stalled, the capital market would no longer accept the prospect of increasing social expectations within welfare states that had grown with economic growth post-war (Lilley 2010). According to Lyngstad (2008), rather than a simple crisis of Keynesian economic ideas, the economic crisis was fostered by a broad range of domestic factors – technology, demography, maturation of the welfare state, and post-Fordist developments, among others.

Polanyi (1947), in his earlier exploration of the history of capitalism, argued that it is continuously involved in processes of over-extension and retreat. This kind of 'double movement', where under- and over-accumulation results in resistances that bring about social and political compromise, created crises within the ideology of capitalism. In the restrained economic context of the early 1970s, this crisis, rather than being seen as a 'crisis of capitalism' easily came to be depicted as a 'crisis of the welfare state' (Taylor-Gooby 2009). This defining of economic crisis in welfare terms emboldened neo-conservative economists to advance neoliberal ideas (Peck 2011). The crisis of Keynesian economics and the burden of the welfare state were predicated upon a more fundamental desire to promote the 'globalisation of capital' (Hyslop-Marginson & Sears 2006, p. 9)

Neoliberal ideas were adopted and advanced on both sides of the Atlantic in the period following World War II. The University of Chicago School of Economics, the Freiburg school in Germany, and the London School of Economics all became sources for the development of neoliberal ideas (Birch 2015). Perhaps the strongest of these, however, has been the School of Economics at the University of Chicago, where economically conservative ideas were exported to governments and supported by organisations within the USA. The birth of lobbying 'think-tanks' (The Heritage Foundation and the Institute of Economic Affairs, USA; The Institute of Economic Affairs, UK; The Institute of Public Affairs, Australia), particularly since the 1980s, have spread its political influence.

The further distillation and embedding of neoliberal ideas of policy and governance were promoted as part of the 'Washington Consensus' (Mishra 1990). By the 1980s, the

major capitalist nations that underpinned the Washington Consensus had ensconced neoliberal principles for economic growth as their major focus, and responded with the development of new institutions for capitalist accumulation. While this became the framework for development within developed countries, it expanded neoliberal approaches of capitalist development worldwide, particularly to Third World countries through the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the US Treasury (Williamson 2004).[3]

The critique developed by neoliberal economists (Hayek 1944; Freidman 1984) of the political philosophy of Keynesian economics and the welfare state rested on three pillars of neoliberal thought: the economic market as the best source of provision in society; state intervention as inherently inefficient and dependency-creating; and welfare states as self-serving, self-interested and untrustworthy. Neoliberal regimes from the late 1970s initially sought to 'roll back' the welfare state, as well as to develop an 'enabling' neoliberalism – where individuals and communities are considered responsible individual citizens. Citizens who are not to be impinged upon by interventionist governments will become self-motivated and create conditions of growth through the economic market. This 'roll-back' neoliberalism is exemplified by the policies and processes of the Thatcher government (1979–90) and Reagan administration (1981–89). In the United Kingdom, the initial focus was on reducing access to pensions, cutting spending on housing, and privatising public assets (Mudge 2008b; Harvey 2005). This has had direct consequences for services within other welfare states. In the Australian context, for example, by the 1990s, any ideas such as the right of a citizen to social services had been replaced by notions of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' recipients. This extended and enhanced residualist concepts of welfare that had underpinned Australia public policy post-war.

By the late 1980s, neoliberal energy was focused on the development of new social arrangements for citizens. This phase of neoliberalism saw the advancement of neoliberal ideas into the fabric of daily lives through the structuring of new social institutions (Peck & Tickell 2002). During this period, neoliberalism's efforts were focused more stridently on the privatisation of the 'social' through direct application of the market to individuals. This period, described as 'roll-out' neoliberalism, represents perhaps the most significant changes to the social and political landscape of post-embedded capitalism (Graefe 2005). New

[3] Williamson outlines 10 elements that define the Washington Consensus and form the heart of its shift away from Keynesian economic principles.

relationships and cultural understandings of the individual and the state were established, and conventional understandings of the role of the welfare state and service provision abandoned. While neoliberalism has continued to promote its links to liberal market fundamentalism, the central changes for citizens alter the basic contentions of the liberal state.

Neoliberalism as a concept appears to have become more strained, with its rhetoric failing to match its actions or its ability to convince others that benefits are shared fairly (Birch & Mykhnenko 2010). Neoliberalism's attempts to convince sections of the general population that a market philosophy based on endless growth will inevitably eradicate inequality has become a more dubious claim. There is greater public evidence that, during the last 40 years of its development, inequality has grown (Rapley 2004).

The idealised notions of the entrepreneurial individual and individuals' freedom to achieve their potential are pitted with panics over the heresy of state intervention. These neoliberal fundamental 'truths of the market' disguise its much broader project of political and cultural reconstruction. Its 'self-obvious truths' have in the past enabled neoliberalism to divert attention from issues of inequality, but growing capital accumulation within ever smaller groups of enterprises and individuals, and the lack of wealth redistribution have become increasingly unpalatable (Birch 2015).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NEOLIBERALISM

In the view of (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 388), any critical understanding of neoliberalism must be formed from 'adequate conceptualizations', which 'must be attentive to *both* the local peculiarities *and* the generic features of neoliberalism'.

At its core, neoliberalism marks the demise of the redistributive role of state-centred institutions, and a belief in unfettered market competition (Harvey 2005). The unbounded freedom of the market performs the function, within neoliberal ideals, of being the arbiter of all things. Neoliberalism is presented as a triumph of the western idea of liberalism, a view which, Fukuyama (1989) suggests, provides neoliberalism with a mantle of omnipresence; it is everywhere and part of everything. This view claims that neoliberalism is experienced (across at least the developed world), in essentially the same way, without regard for culture, location, history or institutions. The idea of neoliberal ideology as a universal 'fit' for many countries, regardless of cultural differences, fails to recognise it as a more complex political project. According to George and Wilding (2003), neoliberalism's claims of universality are

predicated on its ability to adjust to variable social and political contexts rather than on its unified definition. This penetration of a broad range of contexts has been prominent in Third World countries, particularly in Latin America and Africa (Gill 1995), where coercion, accommodation and the manipulation of cultural environments have been used to enforce a neoliberal hegemony (Beck 1999; Wacquant 2005; McDonald & Reisch 2008; Mayo 2011; Peck 2011). According to George (1999, p. 3) this has occurred through an extensive process of lobbying groups, political connections, and think-tanks creating 'no uncontaminated form of, or space for, political resistance'.

Neoliberalism involves the application of considerable political and economic resources, and represents some significant changes to embedded capitalism. According to Bauman (2005), what we are seeing is a different form of capitalist accumulation, one where the processes of accumulation are far more 'liquid', invading spaces, co-existing, adapting and corrupting other forms in the pursuit of capitalism's goals, as opposed to being predominantly within traditional 'solid' ideological structures. As Bauman (2005, p. ii) illuminates, the modernity project is predicated on change, where 'change is *the only* permanence, and uncertainty *the only* certainty'.

The centre-point for processes of accumulation, according to Harvey (2005), rests with the neoliberal state, where the concentration on private property rights, free markets, and ideas of individual liberty, provide the structure to maintain and enable capitalism to flourish unhindered. For Gill (1992), the restructuring of the institutions of the state under neoliberalism signifies a completely new form of regime where the state no longer functions to ensure democratic governance, but rather to ensure the conditions of the market. Neoliberalism acts to expand the globalisation of capital through altered forms of the state, and to draw public resources into the market through the marketising and privatising of the public sector (Jessop 2002, 2003; Graefe 2005; Hyslop-Marginson & Sears 2006; Mayo 2011).

According to Mudge (2008b), neoliberalism seeks a continuity of its progression through three broad and interconnected spheres: the intellectual, the bureaucratic, and the political. Its intellectual mission is to maintain an emphasis on spreading the idea of the market across all aspects of activity, by increasing the application of 'the market' to all aspects of life, and, correspondingly, reducing the dependence of individuals on the state as the sole source of provision. The heavy lifting in the operations of neoliberal advancement rests on its ability to develop and maintain a bureaucratic emphasis on state policy processes

of privatisation, deregulation, and monetarism. Privatisation achieves the movement of resources from public to private hands through the ‘sell off’ of assets, or by ‘contracting out’ services or processes, and by encouraging ‘consumerist entrepreneurism’ that voids traditional bureaucratic processes within public structures.

Neoliberalism has sought to stifle ideological opposition by subjugating competing ideologies through a political process that depoliticises orthodoxy and creates a ‘common sense’ of neoliberal thought, with the result of reconfiguring the state and its relationship with citizens (Hall & O’Shea 2013). Where once the citizenry valued diversity of opinion and the encouragement of differing views (to a point), neoliberal ideology replaces these things with a simple mantra that there is ‘no other option’ but the market. The individual becomes the central instrument within the new state (provided they act as docile consumers), to be lionised as the self-actualising consumer, or demonised as a drain on public resources (Harvey 2006).

As a consequence, the ‘traditional’ state that has provided resources and services to its citizens, also becomes demonised as either slothful or an antiquated drag on personal freedoms. Bauman (2001) describes this changed nature of citizenship, where individuals become either ‘tourists’ or ‘vagabonds’ within the neoliberal state as follows: tourists move easily across a new globalised world with access to resources and opportunities, and vagabonds live out their lives with little opportunity as captives of capitalism’s marketisation. Those who recognise and perform in the market are the ‘tourists’, whereas, for social work constituencies, their confinement to ‘vagabond’ status has led to fewer opportunities, fewer resources, and social stigma as pariahs of the welfare state.

The market fundamentalism at the core of neoliberal ideology gains its legitimacy through a legal framework of a form of ‘rule of law’ in which economic life takes primacy over social forms (Plant 2009). Neoliberalism’s effort is directed toward becoming unchallengeable, according to Mudge (2008b), a non-political, anti-historical ‘common sense’ accepted as undisputable fact. While it progresses the idea of the unchallengeable dominance of a consistent and coherent ideology, Harvey (2005) argues that it has come about more by accident, opportunity and contingency than might be expected.

Within the hegemony of neoliberalism, new relationships between the individual and the state encourage an anti-collectivist approach to public issues. These work to alter the role of structural institutions of democracy, and to encourage a distrust of collective ideals (Harvey 2003). The neoliberal promotion of individualism in all relationships is used to seek

to create a form of hegemonic direct communication between the state and the citizen. This 'liquid' form of hegemonic construction circumvents many of the institutions that have acted to moderate capitalism. Without these impediments, individuals can be reconstituted as 'consumers' for the market, unimpeded by intervening institutions, such as the welfare state. In this way, its hegemony can be reinforced, and can work to disparage alternative ideas and to dispel discontent. The consequence is that the individualisation of relationships within the neoliberal hegemony becomes less about individual choice and more about the creation of quasi-markets that reconfigure the political and legal apparatuses of the state.

Significantly, the mechanisms of the privatisation and deregulation of social provision have been used to shift the role of the state and to reduce state responsibility. By way of example, Mendes (2009) examines the ways in which privatisation has occurred within the Australian unemployment system with the development of the privatised 'Job Network' system of private providers, as opposed to the previously state-run Commonwealth Employment Service. This has applied market principles to the structuring and evaluation of services: the displacement of alternative models, and the creation of self-interest incentives within profit-making organisations. In Plant's (2009) estimation, the state plays a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining neoliberalism's legitimacy by creating these private institutions and functions to serve its needs.

Since the 1990s, governments in the United Kingdom and the United States of America – particularly the Clinton administration (1993–2001) and the Blair (1997–2007) government – have sought to humanise neoliberalism by means of 'third way' politics. This moderating of neoliberal ideas maintains the centrality of 'market fundamentalism', but seeks to resource the social development of individuals as a form of social democracy (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998). This approach, where the market remains the central distributor of resources within society, reflects a desire to move beyond the strictures of neoliberal 'roll back' approaches or the universality of 'welfarism'. These efforts are perceived as responding to the broader social weaknesses of neoliberalism, and its failure to understand the complexity of social issues (Green-Pedersen, van Kersbergen & Hemerijck 2001). This approach, while seeking to moderate neoliberalism's harshest social effects, such as diminution of services and resources, still maintains the individual as the 'responsible agent', and centres personal responsibility as a means to avoid what its proponents perceive as the 'welfarism' of the post-war years.

Additional resources are diverted to social service systems to enhance the capacity of individuals through 'active' provisions rather than 'passive' welfare financial entitlements. These efforts by governments have been criticised as little more than extensions of neoliberalism wearing a nice coat. Jessop (2003) argues that the 'third way' represents little more than a new social formation of mutating neoliberalism. In his view, rather than providing a new alternative to neoliberalism, it acts to reinforce neoliberal ideas with a softer hand. Rather than escaping neoliberalism, Mendes (2003) argues, 'third way' actions reinforce neoliberal dominance by individualising issues that have broader social roots. Ferguson et al. (2006) concur, arguing that the 'third way' construct is a new form of neoliberalism 'nesting' within governments in advanced capitalist societies, by means of maintaining neoliberal ideals but using progressive ideas and language to create a perception of social democracy. This highlights, in Gramscian terms, the way in which neoliberal hegemony is reformed and reinforced by conscripting ideas and language that are seen as contradictory to its approach.

The presentation of neoliberalism as a 'self-obvious' truth of the market misconstrues liberal notions and opens it up to contestation from a number of perspectives. Each of these, I believe, gives insight into the dubious claims of market fundamentalism, and uncovers the conflicted and convoluted nature of neoliberalism's efforts to maintain its hegemony. This thesis draws together a range of critical perspectives on neoliberalism to highlight its multi-faceted construction and its complex hegemony. Peck (2013, p. 144), for example, describes the uniqueness of neoliberalism's formation and reformation: 'a discrepant, contradictory, and shape-shifting presence, found across a wide range of political-economic settings, governance regimes, and social formations, neoliberalism will not be fixed'. The remarkable ability of neoliberalism to 'shape shift' and adjust to its spatial context, Peck (2013) observes, is one of the most powerful aspects of its survival and development. Ong (2006) points this out in the manner in which neoliberalism has taken different forms in social and political environments as diverse as China and Malaysia, the United Kingdom and Singapore. Peck (2003) identifies the value in viewing neoliberalism as a multi-formed project that has dexterity in configuring itself across a broad range of contexts. This suggests that neoliberalism is as much a cultural and political project as an economic one.

England and Ward (2007) identify a number of understandings of neoliberalism with a particular separation between political economy and governance accounts. This provides a way of viewing neoliberalism as a structural form, and as reconfigured processes of

governance. Neoliberalism has sought to alter the parameters of policy formation and of policy by focusing on changed policy-making frameworks, as well as on the ways in which ends are achieved. Policy processes become directly and indirectly linked to ideas of the economic market, where value is defined only in terms of efficiency or market value, and where the interests of citizens become secondary to accumulation and growth (Harvey 2005). The value of these perspectives is that they offer the opportunity to view neoliberalism both as a structural ideology and as a process of cultural and social reconfiguration.

In Harvey's (2005) political economy analysis, neoliberalism can be identified as predominantly a class attack by advanced capitalism to ensure its dominance, a class attack that uses neoliberal class processes of restructuring to create new economic relations of production, and to advance new global processes of financialisation, and the reconstruction of political processes away from democratic forms of citizenship. The state, under advanced capitalism, operates as a mechanism to direct the focus away from democratic processes toward neoliberal ideas of individualism and capital accumulation. While much of the neoliberal rhetoric admonishes the state as lethargic, bureaucratic and interventionist, designed to sap initiative and creativity, it is both dependent upon it and surreptitiously advances a state project to ensure capital accumulation (Harvey 2005).

Interpretations of neoliberalism as a form of governmentality depict it as the activator and disciplinarian for establishing the 'rule of rules', a project where individual responsibility and self-discipline are the means by which government operates (Barnett 2005). This has synergies with neoliberalism as a cultural hegemonic project where a dominant ideological hegemony is formed and reinforced through the consent of individuals. Cultural perspectives provide an illuminating account of the way in which neoliberalism acts as process and as a set of ideas. Brenner, Peck and Theodore (2010) argue that viewing neoliberalism as a process is more productive, as it indicates the ways in which neoliberal hegemony is created through the incorporation of, and adjustment to, contradictory forces and ideas.

The spatial variance of neoliberalism highlights its mutability as a project, and the way in which it is influenced by local social, historical and political forces. These spatial accounts offer an approach focused on the processes of neoliberalism rather than on its dominant ideological claims (Brenner, Peck & Theodore 2010). These 'small n' accounts focus on the processes of neoliberalisation, and view the methods of its adaptation and convolution within different contexts. In this view, constructing neoliberalism as a 'big N' project does not reflect the processes that operate within its local actualities (Ong 2006). The

‘small n’ approach reveals that cultural factors influence the nature of neoliberal hegemony’s contexts. While this can be seen in spatial terms, these reflect social and cultural traditions, as well as political processes and mores within those localities. In the Australian context, the nature of the welfare state, and its mixed model of public and private provision, has to some degree made the country more amenable to neoliberal ideas and practices (Mendes 2003).

‘Small n’ neoliberalism reflects the manner of neoliberal hegemony where the local cultural, political and other considerations equate to significantly different versions and constructs (Peck 2002). From this perspective, neoliberal activity represents an assemblage of changing and often contradictory elements that adapt to cultural, political and social circumstance. Lobao (2005) similarly suggests that a range of community and regional processes intervene in social relationships that go into forming individual neoliberal projects, and that the differences can be significant.

Ong (2006) argues that it is essential to examine neoliberal development through the considerable variance in the application of its ideas and practices across localities and constituencies, rather than just examining the commonalities between locations. Actors and relationships conflict in different locations, bringing about variable outcomes that influence institutional, policy and program applications (Clarke 2004; Ong 2006). Understanding the local variations of neoliberal development, they are indicative not just of the variety of its forms in different locations, but also of its insight into the hegemonic processes of its reproduction. This thesis argues that neoliberalism in Australia has operated and developed within a particular cultural and political context, and that these considerations have a particular pertinence to social work and its historical and cultural role in the fabric of Australian society.

This variability of neoliberalism ‘on the ground’ is evident, according to Ong (2006), between nation states; she cites the marked differences in neoliberalism in China (where neoliberalism operates within special market zones), Malaysia (where Islamic corporatism has evolved (Ong 2005)), and Europe (where Brexit forms part of its uneven development (Jessop 2018)). In practical terms, although neoliberalism might operate as a set of guiding principles across locations, Clarke (2004) says that it remains highly contingent upon local cultural, political and economic forces. This highlights the ways in which neoliberalism operates as an ideology as a form of ‘path dependency’ (Lobaco 2005), where pervious historical approaches are more likely to continue and be maintained through localised practices and ideas, and impact upon a neoliberal agenda. Neoliberalism seeks, therefore, to

seduce and accommodate local requirements, and to meld them with neoliberal ideas as part of presenting an apolitical cultural project (Clarke 2004).

The internal tension created by these local accommodations creates new social risks for neoliberalism. Its attempts to develop new forms of social cohesion create, however, an instability for its core project, as it is drawn into conflicting ideas and modified as a consequence (Graefe 2005; George 2006). This localisation can be seen in efforts to capture and use ideas and to develop political processes that 'embrace a range of extra-market forms of governance and regulation. These included, inter alia, the selective appropriation of "community" and nonmarket metrics, the establishment of social-capital discourses and techniques' (Peck & Tickell 2002, p. 390).

According to Ong (2006), neoliberal hegemony operates more as an uneven assemblage of techniques, practices and technologies, which have been used to seduce, co-opt, or contain uncomfortable encounters with local political processes and cultural expectations. The unevenness of its actions and representations across locations, as well as its mobility and dexterity, make its development and maintenance complex and conflicted. Barnett (2005, p. 11) convincingly argues that neoliberalism is a more muddled and ad hoc hegemonic ideology than it portrays, for while it thrives on opportunistic accommodations, its unstable dynamics make it difficult for it to be convincing as a coherent political-ideological project.

A spatial analysis of neoliberalism examines the way in which ideology functions as an assembly of ideas and practices that mutate in local contexts and vary with social and political frameworks. It provides an account that demonstrates the circumstances of its fracture, its mechanisms of change, and the possibilities of resistance. Spatial perspectives do not negate the central influence of neoliberal ideas, but identify the fluidity of its project and the considerable effort required to maintain its hegemony.

In this study, I have taken the view that understanding neoliberalism as a dynamic hegemonic project breaks through the hard shell of its rhetoric. Geographic renditions of neoliberalism see it as essentially a process rather than a destination or outcome (Peck & Tickell 2002). Viewed from this perspective, neoliberalism takes on a highly varied and variegated actuality. The specifics of localism, be they institutions, actors or cultural circumstances, produce diverse effects, and lead to hybrid forms that are difficult to reconcile with neoliberalism's ideological position (Brenner et al. 2012).

NEOLIBERALISM AS POLICY AND PROGRAM

Somewhat hidden within the neoliberal ideological doctrine of the 'centrality of the market', there is evidence of a more detailed political project (aimed at reorienting institutions and practices and establishing new policy processes), where the economic market is the predominant factor, and policy aims and processes are prescribed to fit market objectives. In this context, social welfare services become measured by their economic efficiency and benefit – and benefit is defined in terms of making individuals less dependent upon the state. Neoliberalism has sought to achieve this through the privatisation of public goods and the marketisation of organisations, services and people.

The aim of neoliberalism has been to reconstruct policy as a managerial organisational process that focuses on business management structures, whose processes are seen as essential, and where, in line with commercial enterprises, economic efficiency and accountability are the measures of policy success. Policy, from this perspective, contains the sub-text that if it is handled by the market it will necessarily be efficient and beneficial to all citizens by way of garnering the cheapest, and most efficient and reliable mode of delivery. The criterion of market efficiency centralises competition to ensure the 'best price'. More broadly the effect of such an objective, in policy terms, is to relinquish state responsibility for provision of services, and to facilitate the transfer of public resources into private hands.

To achieve this policy process shift, according to Chang (2001), requires the development of this new institutional 'common sense', a social and cultural acceptance that the market creates, and is the only way to create, equality and fairness. The result is the fundamentally political nature of the market as policy processes, in its effort to negate the possibility of a deeper policy analysis or to examine the effectiveness of market mechanisms for the distribution of social and economic value. Consequently, the state, once the arbiter of social good, becomes constrained and conflicted by relinquishing control and becoming the agent of the market.

Within the policy context, the dual neoliberal processes of privatisation and marketisation have worked to exclude individuals and groups from policy processes (Harris 2003; Ferguson 2008); for example, services for older Australians are seen as structured around their private value in the market, and choice of services is driven by resources and income. Privatisation and marketisation have both been used as instruments of the 'commodification' of human need that orients individuals and groups to the market, crowding

out alternative views; private models of healthcare and health insurance have created pressure upon the public hospital system in Australia, for instance.

Harris (2003) suggests that these processes fit with the objectives of neoliberalism, where ‘marketisation’, the controlling of the ‘demand ‘side of economic relationships, substitutes individualism for collectivism and consumerism for welfare statism. Privatisation, through controlling the ‘supply’ side of economic relations, operates to remanufacture organisations and resources as part of the private market, making the circumstances of individuals an issue of market forces and consumer choice. Dominelli (1999) describes neoliberalism as a hegemony of monetary stealth, rather than of processes of ideological persuasion, where resources are shifted from the public realm to private commercial interests. This has led to a radical alteration to both the organisation and value base of the welfare state and social work, where organisations are organised as commercial entities.

The combination of these mechanisms has a seemingly endless set of permutations, penetrating welfare states and creating (in spite of their variability) common policy frameworks across broad sectors of society. The application of the new managerial practices and structures has redirected scarce resources toward ‘capital’ (Fabricant & Burghardt 1992). The combination of these effects has created a conflicted environment for agencies, where workers increasingly find their disciplines’ practices and approaches anathema to new organisational processes.

While managerial processes have left the private market largely unfettered, other sectors of society have become increasingly regulated through marketisation. Fiscal restraint and new processes of accountability and control have been instituted as policy responses across a range of services and programs (Jessop 1990). Previously accepted policy responses of the welfare state, such as the right of citizens to social services, are now being vilified as policy responses and presented as a drain on hard-working citizens, corrupting individual freedoms and proliferating a crisis-riddled, profligate and inefficient social system. This has provided the policy opportunity for increased cost containment that has reduced resources and service, and compounded anxieties (Jessop 2002b).

Early versions of neoliberalism from the late 1970s, visible in measures by the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom (such as cuts to the National Health Service, education and social housing), and the Reagan government in the USA (such as cuts to public education , social services and employment support), sought to ‘roll back’ welfare states by

reducing resources and opting out of service provision (Pierson 1991). This harsh version of neoliberal policy-making used depictions of 'waste', 'inefficiency' and 'dependency creation' as arguments for the roll back (Hall 2011). The effect has been to legitimise arguments for increased personal responsibility, the pathological attribution of blame of individuals for their circumstances, and the creation of a stampede against taxation for the public good, at least in some areas.

By the early 1990s, neoliberal policy responses became more focused on the development of new institutional structures and processes, the so-called 'roll-out' phase of neoliberalism, with its focus on the restructuring of relationships and policy processes within society at large. These actions, including 'flanking', operate to further enhance the marketisation of policy processes (Jessop 2003). The effect of these changed social policy frameworks, Lorenz (2005) suggests, has been to construct a set of political conditions with little opportunity for critical engagement within organisations and neoliberal policy processes (Harvey 2006).

Efforts to engage with 'roll out' neoliberal policy structures have sought to humanise neoliberalism by adding a degree of social responsibility. Examples such as 'third way' policy initiatives in the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe, have sought to maintain market approaches, but with a more humane social responsiveness (Jessop 2003; Graefe 2005). As previously outlined, opponents of 'third way' ideology suggest that it has maintained neoliberalism's main agenda through the acceptance of a business culture, increasing surveillance, and excluding professionals from policy processes, all under the pretext of increased social responsiveness (Green-Pedersen 2001: Ferguson et al 2006).

Fitzsimons (2000), for example, highlights that in New Zealand neoliberal social policy, initiatives have shifted the focus from collective social concerns to individual problems, and the community has been reinvented as either a vehicle for increasing 'social capital', or for developing 'social cohesion'. Issues of collectivity, local variance, and personal identity are lost to the marketised notion of value. These accounts of the mechanisms and institutional renderings of neoliberalism provide a vehicle through which to understand the ways it has gone about practically establishing and maintaining its hegemony.

NEOLIBERALISM AS A STATE FORM

The state as a theme within neoliberal ideology is often characterised as a curtailment of individual freedom and a drain on society (Jessop 1990). Institutional reformation and restructuring under neoliberalism provide a discrete subject of analysis of the way in which the institutions of the state have been drawn into a kind of ideological conflict not seen since the Second World War, between liberalism, fascism and communism (Berman 2006). This institutional rendering of neoliberalism reveals the nature of its project, and confirms that its attempts at institutional restructuring involve simply modifying existing institutions, and are influenced by actors, values and discourses. Institutional perspectives also countenance the role of the state as the vehicle for maintaining neoliberal ascendency. Jessop (1991) argues that neoliberalism is dependent on state institutions to stabilise and progress its project. He concludes that neoliberalism operates to transform capitalism into a new form of accumulation by dispossession.

The state, according to neoliberalism, is slothful, meddling and an encumbrance (Gill 1995). This depiction is inconsistent with several demonstrations of the role of the state in enhancing and ensuring neoliberalism's hegemony. As Cahill (2016, p. 468) argues, 'neoliberalism has not resulted in a retreat of the state from the economy, and the state has also been integral to the implementation, reproduction, and extension of neoliberalism'. What can also be argued is that not only has the state not been reduced under neoliberalism, but that it has taken on different functions. Political economy theorists argue that the focus on ideological institutions and their attendant mechanisms has changed governance structures under neoliberalism (England & Ward 2007). These changes in the structure and function of the state represent, in Harvey's (2006) view, the escalation of a class project aimed at capital accumulation through institutional apparatus devised only in the interests of capitalist elites. This, in many critical accounts, is where the roots of neoliberalism as an ideological project are to be found (Harvey 2005).

The neoliberal use of the state offers a 'heterogeneous set of institutions consisting of various ideas, social and economic policies, and ways of organising political and economic activity' (Campbell & Pedersen 2001, cited in Mudge 2008a, p. 705). The major effort of governments and state processes within neoliberalism is to reconstruct relationships between global capitalism, nation states, the institutions of government, and the individual (Hall 1988; Rose 1999). The effect is to directly connect citizens as consumers to the global market through economic institutions and personal choice.

The neoliberal state acts to protect the market by constraining opportunities to challenge the supremacy of market philosophy by limiting debate. Hyslop-Marginson and Sears (2006) argue that under neoliberalism the state acts to develop, conduct and surveil the new social citizenship in order to establish a non-conflictual, docile social order. The form of neoliberal social cohesion, based on consent rather than consensus, is reliant on enforcement through accountability, scrutiny and surveillance mechanisms.

The role of the state under neoliberalism is, however, conflicted; for while it seeks to act in the interests of capital, it must also constrain the demands of society. As Chang (2001) points out, the state's desire to maintain its legitimacy as the protector of the market contradicts its actions to admonish the state as a slothful, self-interested impediment by relying on those same groups and individuals to act to appease and contain dissent. In an interview with Sasha Lilley (2011), Noam Chomsky argues that neoliberalism is only rhetorically linked to the notion of 'free markets'. His claim is that the economic market is allegorically 'free', but in real terms serves the interests of elites through market protections. These elites seek that the 'freedom of the market' be applied to ordinary citizens, but pursue government intervention to protect their own interests.

The state plays quite a different role within neoliberal hegemony than in the previous, embedded version of capitalism. Where previously the state has acted as a brake on the acquisitive nature of capitalism through government transfers and public services, it has now come to champion and protect the interests of capitalism more directly. These changes are also manifested in efforts by the state to reconfigure its own role and the role of citizens and the democratic nation state.

In the neoliberal state, the new consumer citizen is given the illusion of choice through the construction of direct relationships between governments as managers and individuals as consumers. The civic responsibility, the degree of collective concern and public advocacy of the embedded democratic state, is wound back as market ideology replaces it. As Lobao (2005, p. 4) points out, the neoliberal 'direct' government model circumvents bureaucratic processes and collective concerns by constructing 'citizen-driven response to improving government by making it more flexibly tailored to local needs'. This is embodied in new forms of marketing and customer feedback, where individuals communicate directly with government, albeit in a distanced and stylised way. Customer feedback processes proliferate in which workers, services and organisations are evaluated; in the context of Australian publication education, for example, parents are encouraged to 'take

greater control' of schools by choosing staff and rating schools, teachers and principals. The uncertainty of the modern state reflects a shift from governing for citizens to individuals being responsible for their own situation (Rose 1999). The new role of the state, through a reduction in its involvement in civil society, configures a crisis for the welfare state, and develops in an atmosphere of increased uncertainty (Leonard 1997; Hugman 1998; Plant 2009; Taylor-Gooby 2010; Mayo 2011).

THE RISE OF NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE

The changed role of the state under neoliberalism is marked by the active construction of new forms of governance. According to Marsh (2005), power has moved from 'thick to thin' forms of governance, and where once the instruments of the state were used directly to deliver and manage the organisation of individuals and groups, new governance arrangements rely on notions of self-governance and personal responsibility.

Under 'thin' governance, 'static' institutions are replaced by 'inventive, strategic technical and artful set of assemblages' (Miller & Rose 1990, p. 131) that spread out over the political landscape, encouraging self-management and innovative responses to situations. These new governance forms have replaced older formations and organisations and 'have broadly adopted neo-liberal policy frames' (Marsh 2005, p. 23). Government and the state become the organisers of the 'conduct of conduct', the rules that dictate behaviour by means of the production of benchmarks, standards, targets, and norms. The state vacates the space of intervention and direct contact, and becomes 'governance at a distance'. The construction of citizens as responsible agents is set within a framework of self-governance and self-reliance, all commanded within an economic frame. Neoliberal governance configures different modes of operation across regions, nations and local communities, all set, as Clarke (2008) describes, within the central importance of global transnational relations.

Neoliberalism's fundamental pattern of development has followed the route of manipulating crises to construct new governance forms centred on market supremacy through privatisation and global financialisation (Harvey 2005). This is evident where 'moral panics' have been created about Australian social welfare services – for example, the media promotion of the 'dole bludger' (individuals manipulating the social security system). This neoliberal method of governance is by appropriation rather than ideological domination, where practices, language and discourse are reconstructed, co-opted or discredited for

neoliberal advantage. This process of appropriation involves a re-assembling of lived experience and practices in line with new governance measures at the local level (Clarke 2008; Ong 2006). In the case above, the assumption is that there is an inherent and widespread abuse of the social security system by individuals, predominantly women, who were 'cheating the system'. This has led to a service system focused on criminalising poverty and instituting a policy of 'Mutual Obligation' under which individuals are responsible to society, rather than the other way around (Saunders 2000b). The changed mechanisms of nation state governance under neoliberalism have, Marsh (2005) argues, brought about a decline in democratic governance; democratic processes no longer fit with neoliberal common sense, and interest groups and social movements have been alienated from the political process.

NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Internal tensions within neoliberal hegemony render it vulnerable to new social risks and, while it appears to be a dominant project, it has had to construct new social forms to maintain social consent. This 'thin' hegemony of constantly seeking to maintain consent is in marked contrast to the previous social democratic project, where civil society acted to create social consensus through groups and interests in civil society. In this way, groups and individuals influenced social policy processes and outcomes. I the past, this has been most evident in social and environmental campaigns by unions, environment groups and local social action groups. Within a thin hegemony, where there is little agreement about collective negotiated goals, instability results from constantly having to seek to maintain consent by juggling new social risks, creating fears, and disparaging alternate civil concerns to maintain a cohesive neoliberal project (George 2006).

The new institutions of social cohesion act as a flotilla to defend the neoliberal project, but, when challenged, have the potential to compromise its core ideas through repeated processes of hegemonic adaptation and mutation. Developing inclusive or 'roll-out' neoliberal projects often end up being 'more socially interventionist and ameliorative forms', in order to regulate, discipline and contain those marginalised or dispossessed by early processes of neoliberalism (Graefe 2005, p. 2). Maintaining neoliberal hegemony is also threatened by erosion over time where it is unable to meet basic societal needs of employment and other services. Tensions, however, within neoliberal hegemony do not

necessarily bring about a moderating of its endeavours, and may result in new social relations in more extreme ways. Neoliberal ideas have continued to maintain an ability to develop responses to its contradictions and antagonisms. According to Clarke (2008), the maintenance of market ideas through acquiring and adapting opposing ideas presents risks to neoliberalism of mutating away from its ideological foundations.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a brief exploration of the historical development of neoliberalism, and contended that neoliberalism is an unavoidably imprecise ideological term, but one that is useful as a means of examining its structural ideological processes. Some conservative arguments suggest that it is a figment of the academic imagination of the left, that it lacks meaning and is merely a confection of economic concerns (Hartwich 2009). Hall (2011), for example, accepts that neoliberalism is neither easily defined nor constrained as an ideology, but that it remains a useful tool for analysis of the development of capitalism.

In this chapter, a number of critical ideological positions about neoliberalism have been presented. Some of these depict it in ways that focus on its central structural tenets, while others have seen it as an ideology that is a flawed, multi-formed project, and under constant challenge. The study draws upon the idea of neoliberalism as a mutational process that alters both structures, processes, language and relationships to maintain the centrality of the economic market as the guiding principle of society, forgoing ideas of democracy along the way. Its illuminations on issues of choice, and the importance of the individual rather than the state, mask a hegemonic dominance built upon rhetorical notions that substantially reduce citizenship to consumerism.

This chapter has examined a number of critical interpretations to highlight the differing and complex understandings of neoliberalism. I argue that these provide us with insights into particular aspects of neoliberal formation and its processes, and provide scope for the analysis of its impact. Avoiding a narrowly defined, unified definition of neoliberalism, it is argued here, offers the prospect, for social work in Australia, of a more complex and sophisticated understanding of neoliberal processes, locational variations, and of its political and cultural reinvention in a contemporary context.

There are significant structural and contextual aspects to neoliberalism that highlight its fragmented, ad hoc and unstable nature, but nevertheless it remains a very adaptable

ideological hegemony. Peck (2011) describes this process as failing to move forward, where its ability to re-group, reform and tumble on becomes perhaps one of its greatest strengths. This chapter has offered an account of the ways in which neoliberalism works to contend with opposing or countering ideas and processes as a form of hegemonic construction. The study argues that any theoretical account of neoliberalism needs to address both the structural elements of its dominance, as well as its hegemonic processes' construction and reconstruction, and the ways in which it is able to manipulate and disrupt as a mode of regeneration.

This thesis contends that neoliberal hegemony is a troublesome project that disarms professions like social work in the way it forms and reforms its processes to meet and disenfranchise opposing ideas. The thesis contends, however, that the very nature of these neoliberal convolutions makes it loaded with contradictions and possibilities of response. It also argues that the development of an understanding of the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism, its vulnerabilities and strengths, provides a basis for developing responses that resist and disrupt neoliberalism and provide opportunities for social change.

This chapter has developed both an introduction to the ideas of neoliberalism from a critical perspective and as a way of expanding the ways we might interpret neoliberalism's impact. This chapter acts as a precursor to examining this impact, but also as a way of viewing the kinds of responses made by social work in Australia.

CHAPTER 3
THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON SOCIAL WORK

Neoliberalism's influence has been felt in most areas of life over the course of the last 30 years. In this chapter, I will describe the impact of neoliberalism, as well as its intertwined relationship with globalisation and the challenges it has presented to the welfare state. Its effects on social work will be explored in terms of its macro and micro impact, and how social work has been affected by altered contexts and relationships. The analysis of the literature on the impact of neoliberalism on social work in the chapter acts as a precursor to a more in-depth analysis of the way in which hegemonic processes have developed and might be challenged.

Clive Barrett (2010) suggests that the impact of neoliberalism can be understood in a number of ways; by searching out the diffuse ways it is applied in different locations, considering the way in which, as an ideology, it develops differently as a consequence. Further, Barrett suggests that examining the way in which it goes about normalising its ideology within different locations provides an account of its methods and impact. Harvey (2011, p. 105) considers that one of the significant impacts of neoliberalism is on 'the commons' of citizenship, those things that are not directly controlled by capital but are essential to society at large. He argues that while neoliberalism has sought to 'accumulate' these public commons into a market realm, they are being produced continually. The challenge is that 'the commons' 'are continuously being enclosed and appropriated by capital in its commodified and monetary form'.

In general terms, some of the most significant effects of neoliberalism have been structural, altering, or seeking to alter, the position of capital, and consequently redefining institutions, structures and relationships. Hall and O'Shea (2013) describe the structural effects of neoliberalism as being the individualisation of all relationships, the construction of everything as part of a competitive private market, creating an accepted common sense of ideas, where the only relationships that have substance are economic. This significant change from the way in which individuals have understood their position in society 'has been paralleled by an upsurge in feelings of insecurity, anxiety, stress and depression' (Hall & OShea,2013 p. 12.

The effects of neoliberalism are visible across most areas of life, and its impact is evident in multiple disciplines (sociology, political economy, human geography, and education, for example). The effects vary with contextual circumstances and political and social influences, but it has produced common influences that are noted in Chapter 2. This thesis argues that the effects of neoliberalism on previously accepted notions of the state, economic development, social provision, and citizenship have had their greatest impact upon those who have least the power, resources and opportunities within society.

What is different about neoliberalism is its escalation of the citizen as individual subject, and its efforts to negate the appearance of any moral tension, inherent in liberal philosophy, between its notion of the citizen and the market (Brown 2005). This ideological manipulation by market fundamentalism to construct a 'common sense', according to Hall and O'Shea (2013, p. 8), operates by asserting that popular opinion already agrees, and by manipulating this to produce consent as an effect. The circularity of this method identifies the neoliberal alternative as a way of manufacturing consent, in place of traditional ideological processes of consensus (Burawoy 1979).

NEOLIBERALISM, GLOBALISATION, AND THE WELFARE STATE

This chapter first considers the broad impact of neoliberalism on western-style democracies such as Australia, then proceeds to focus on its impact on the welfare state and social work. This thesis considers neoliberalism's effects, not as a singular process, but one involving the ways in which it has combined with the globalisation of capital. An understanding of the relationship between neoliberalism and globalisation is considered valuable because it affords the opportunity to explore the often-symbiotic nature of its connections with neoliberalism, as well as its consequences for a discipline such as social work. This thesis contends that the intertwined nature of the relationship between neoliberal and globalising processes have significant consequences for social work as an emancipatory project.

Globalisation is a topic of magnum opus proportions, and as a topic for analysis, Jessop (2003) advises that its complexity, tensions and variability make it difficult to draw causal conclusions. There is not the opportunity, in a small study such as this, to provide more than a brief introduction to the topic of globalisation, but some exploration of its relationship to neoliberalism is necessary. Neoliberalism's relationship with globalisation, Jessop (2003) suggests, rather than a following direct global trajectory, is an amalgam of

contradictory trends and conflicted interpretations. The complexity of globalisation is taken up by Sewpaul (2006, p. 41), who suggests that it represents a set of 'multi-faceted cultural, communication, technological, psychological and economic' processes.

Dominelli's (1999, p. 14) analysis suggests that contemporary globalisation, forms 'a new mode of social organisation that capitalists have created to conduct social relations within a world economy'. This has resulted in the partial annulment of territorial boundaries that have been used to restrict the operation of capitalism. The development of global flows has not simply been financial, but has included most things, including, for example, information, security and weapons, goods and services, people, and, most significantly, capital.

The global economic developments of empire building in the past reflect forms of globalisation, where periods of colonisation, imperialism and mercantilism made claims across the world in different forms (Bordo, Taylor & Williamson 2003). Contemporary globalisation offers the possibility of a shift of capital to globalised markets, with significant expansion of economic growth (Crouch 2011). Its uniqueness lies in the particular way it harnesses both the mechanisms of global economic integration – mass technological change and new organisational regimens – and integrates these with market-oriented neoliberal ideas.

Globalisation has become the beneficiary of neoliberal mechanisms to advance the globalised market. The escaping of the confines of the nation state and the consequent unburdening from welfare states has, since the late 1970s, been a significant shift in capitalism and the globalisation of capital (Hyslop-Marginson & Sears 2006). The changes brought about by globalisation are to the ways in which capital and its social responsibilities are reconfigured. Global capitalism's processes are complex, according to Hirst and Thompson (1996), as the rise of trading blocs and nation state alliances has created a distinctly competitive and complex environment; they note the limited number of truly globalised trans-national organisations compared to nation states.

The expansion of global capitalism has sought to revise industrial relationships within liberal democracies, altering industrial power and the position of workers. Where historically there has been acceptance of and support for the protective influence of the welfare state, this has been undermined by workers, who have traditionally been ardent supporters of the welfare state, and have begun to lose not only industrial power and credibility, but also the possibility to resist (Peetz & Bailey 2011). The challenge to relations of production based on

the differentiation between the interests of capital and the working class has led to a direct challenge to unionism on a number of fronts. The traditional role of workers in industrial relations in Australia had been usurped by the dismantling of the arbitration system in the mid-1980s (Bowden 2011), as well as by new bargaining agreements between workers and capital, and efforts to pigeonhole unions as communist, anti-individual interest, and corrupt.

The globalisation of capital has also reframed relations between the market and the state. Where under embedded liberalism the state represented a mediating force to protect citizens from the unexpected consequences of capitalism, and to redistribute wealth through the use of defined boundaries and the control of relations, under the neoliberal version of liberalism, the state performs the function of protector of the interests of the market, reduces the scope of its own activity, and forges new patterns of individual reliance and individual community responsibility. These make for fundamental shifts for social work as a state-sponsored social provision.

The relationship between neoliberalism and globalisation is of particular importance, as neoliberalism acts to prioritise economic relationships above all others through process and symbolism within the new global economy (Bourdieu 1998). The neoliberal process of creating quasi-markets through commodified policy processes can be understood as modern capitalism's new political method of driving a particular form of globalisation (Rangal 2005, cited in Ferguson, Lavalette & Whitmore 2005, p. 15).

Ferguson and Woodward (2009) depict neoliberalism's relationship with globalisation as forming part of a 'neoliberal fable' constructed to frame and justify reductions in public spending while encouraging private profit, with the profound effect of promoting and securing global capitalism using neoliberal ideology. This is most evident for social work in processes of welfare retrenchment and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises (Ferguson 2005). Globalisation's power is significant as a new mode of social organisation of the world economy in the way it uses a raft of cultural, communication, economic and technological forms in concert with neoliberalism (Dominelli 1999). Neoliberalism, according to Sewpaul (2006), acts as the particularly penetrative organising process in aid of globalisation of the personal and social space of individuals' lives.

One of the specific consequences of globalisation has been the demise of controls and structures previously used by nation states. These now have a more limited reach, particularly with regard to welfare systems. The consequence of the relationship between neoliberalism

and globalisation has been to destabilise conventional nation states and their welfare systems with increasing demands for flexibility and the creation of greater inequality both within and between nation states (Jessop 2003).

The result has been an increasingly aggressive form of capital accumulation that has altered many accepted social relationships without regard for, or protection from, their social consequences. Hirst and Thompson (1996) offer a less stark view, suggesting that globalisation as a project has, as yet, failed to produce the kind of globalised market envisaged. However, the changed role of state under globalised capitalism has had a considerable impact on the most vulnerable within society where increasing inequality, individual responsibilisation and social needs considered predominantly in economic terms. This has had direct consequences for social work, its role, relationships, and its practices, where its value and meaning in the context of contemporary capitalism is disputed and marginalised.

NEOLIBERALISM AND THE AUSTRALIAN WELFARE STATE

Harris (2003) suggests that post-World War II welfare states have historically been the primary social framework of liberal representative democracy. The Australian welfare state, briefly discussed in Chapter 2, has been both a location for social support and for social connectedness to the state. For social work in Australia, it has been the definitive source of its history and identity, and has had a particular prominence as a site for analysing the impact of neoliberalism on social work.

Esping-Andersen (1990) typifies the Australian welfare state, historically, as a liberal welfare state regime, centred on means testing and moderate universalist undertakings, and targeted towards low-income individuals. Its main focus is on the maintenance of the market at all costs, including public transfers to private welfare organisations and limited social provision, with rare examples of universalism. Consequently, the Australian version of the welfare state falls far short of the extensive universalist provisions that developed in northern Europe (Esping-Andersen 1990). The dismantling of these aspects of the Australian welfare state has acted as an essential strategy to enhance market penetration of the public realm, and to reduce and/or shift expenditure from the public to the individual (Alessandrini 2002; Baines 2006).

Heroic notions of the Australian welfare state based on Keynesian interventionist ideas as a mirror of social democratic ideals do not provide an accurate depiction of its history (Watts 1987; Esping-Andersen 1990, 1996; Pierson 2001; Taylor-Gooby 2005; McDonald & Reisch 2008). The Australian welfare state has always, in Castles' (1985) view, reflected a 'wage-earners' welfare state', aimed at limited protections in the context of limiting unemployment.

Following the oil crisis of the 1970s, changed economic conditions worldwide – rising inflation and economic stagnation – fostered concerns about the ability of Keynesian welfare state economics to meet these challenges (Pierson 1991). What became known as the 'crisis' of the welfare state signalled the rise of neoliberal economic prescriptions as the only means of arresting the downturn. Perceptions of the failure of Keynesian economics, and the presumedly counter-productive nature of the welfare state, have been used to justify neoliberal market approaches ever since. The validity of these claims, and the impact of neoliberal economic and political frameworks on the Australian welfare state, gives cause for analysis and discussion.

Kelly (1994) argues that the Australian welfare state has long reflected a public policy position of state paternalism, with limited, targeted and inward-looking social provision. Even during the post-war boom, Australian welfare responses have always reflected limited aims, and the fiscal resourcing crisis of the 1970s, and the rise of neoliberal ideas, merely exposed and capitalised upon the economic and policy circumstances that had existed for many decades. The so-called 'crisis' of the Australian welfare state, mirroring similar experiences in most western nations, was promulgated as a loss of faith in the ability of the Keynesian economic model to provide an effective response in circumstances of stagnant growth (Castles 1985; Harris & McDonald 2000; Huber & Stephens 2010)

This view suggests that Keynesian ideals are only fit for a time of growth and expansion. Castles (1985), however, concluded that, rather than a failure of Keynesian economics, the crisis reflected a loss of faith in the idea of social democratic consensus that underpinned the Australian welfare state. The Australian welfare state was, he suggests, dependent on its ability to maintain full employment (Castles 1985). Others suggest that the crisis represented a loss of belief in social policy approaches and the failure of the welfare state to produce substantive outcomes for disadvantaged citizens (Kelly 1994; Saunders 2000a).

Jessop (2002) argues that this crisis marked a change in the nature of capitalism: from a Fordist production capitalism to a post-Fordist consumer capitalism. The so-called 'crisis' is not a crisis of the welfare state, but an ongoing shift in the structure of industrial resources and the way in which public resources are utilised. It can be considered in effect, a politically manufactured crisis, created in the interests of capital to redress what are seen as the constricted economic circumstances of the 1970s and 1980s in favour of a new capital accumulation. As identified by Esping-Andersen (1990), the difficulty was that welfare state policy settings were no longer seen as effective in meeting changing understandings of needs.

The 'crisis' provided the opportunity, Lorenz (2005) highlights, not just to create a new social policy regime, but to complete a re-ordering of social relationships based on neoliberal ideas. For social work, this has meant marked alterations to its ideas of how it relates to disadvantaged individuals and the state as a whole. Rose (1999) identifies this shift under neoliberalism as a process of governing through individual self-realisation rather than through society. In all areas of the state, not just social work, neoliberalism refocuses democratic citizenship objectives to the goal of developing citizens as human capital (Hyslop-Marginson & Sears 2006). The new social citizenship of neoliberalism forms its social cohesion not through intervention by the state in the interest of citizens, but rather through the state acting to create docility and order through new governance and citizenship arrangements.

Similarly, in Taylor-Gooby's (2010) account, the crisis of the welfare state is a manufactured political process designed to extend individual consumerism at the expense of collectivism, through changed values of citizenship and the role of the state. What has been withdrawn, in Taylor-Gooby's (2010, p. 12) view, are the key elements of reciprocity and trust, which not only legitimise a particular direction but also '[nourish] the legitimacy of the system as a whole'. A consensus is formed by these means that the system as a whole will work (Taylor-Gooby 2010).

Hugman (1998) and Leonard (1997) both identify how the demise of the central role of the state has created uncertainty about individual identity and citizenship, with a contradiction between the market and social investment. The 'crisis of faith' extends to issues of social citizenship where the state's changed role fundamentally challenges what people understand as citizenship. From this perspective, the crisis is not of the welfare state but of capital accumulation, where the welfare state and its attendant functions, such as social work,

are no longer necessary, and are considered counter-productive to global economic competitiveness (Harris 2003).

The promotion of affluence and aspirational desires has been an important ingredient in neoliberal efforts to change the relationships between individuals and institutions, and the expectations of the state. The consequences are more strongly evident for Australian workers in general, and for those dependent upon welfare state provision.

The neoliberal view of the welfare state as a luxurious decadence that should be dismantled, and that individuals should be responsible for their own circumstances, presents difficulties in reality. Mitchell (2001), for example, highlights the paradox of this new globalised approach, which on the one hand derides welfare state social policy approaches as wasteful and creating disincentives, while on the other relying on those same welfare state policies to smooth the changes brought about by globalised capitalism. Additionally, free market economic growth is not without its tensions, which, while espousing expenditure cuts, increasingly relies of public expenditure for employment creation and job subsidies.

The diminished role for government within the neoliberal state, where nation states no longer hold such strong control over their external relationships, boundaries, and regulatory mechanisms, has created scepticism about government and its motivations (Hugman 1998; Leonard 1997). Where previously the state governed in the interests of citizens, the new governance encourages and enforces the self-reliance of the individual (Rose 1999). The role of the state is further diminished under new forms of social citizenship, where bonds are created between the individual and the market rather than between citizen and the state (Hyslop-Marginson & Sears 2006). Taylor-Gooby (2009, p. 86) identifies the growing affluence and individualisation in post-war western democracies as having eroded the old solidarities by establishing ‘the individual rational actor, consequently undermining traditional understandings of social citizenship’.

The Australian welfare state, unlike European social democratic welfare states (Taylor-Gooby 2005; McDonald & Reisch 2008) has focused on the maintenance of the market at all costs, including public transfers to private welfare organisations. The liberalism of the Australian welfare state perhaps makes it more vulnerable to the ideological advances of neoliberalism (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Neoliberalism can be seen to have progressed through several phases. Firstly, focusing on the implementation of stringency measures designed to wind back services and

cripple the welfare state. This 'roll-back' neoliberalism generated strident opposition, and faced localised difficulties to its continual expansion. The crises born of these challenges have caused the evolution of a new form of neoliberalism based on 'roll-out' measures. As a method of advancing a neoliberal agenda, these new processes and actions are designed to create new sets of social relations between the individual and the state, and to impede the role of government as social provider. These new, 'inclusive' approaches and new social arrangements reflect, for some, a new social democratising of earlier hard-line neoliberal approaches (Blair 1998; Giddens 1998).

'Third way' initiatives by governments in the UK and the US represent 'roll-out' efforts designed to appear to soften hard-line neoliberal stringencies without losing focus on marketisation as a central agenda. For others, 'third way' initiatives simply maintain an existing neoliberal approach, albeit with a touch of social democratic influence, but still culminate in the acceptance of the withdrawal of the state, the expansion of a business culture combined with increased surveillance, and the exclusion of social workers from social ideals and policy processes (Green-Pedersen 2001; Ferguson et al. 2006).

NEOLIBERALISM'S IMPACT ON SOCIAL WORK

The context of a changing welfare state has primary importance for social work, given the historical location of its work, and the foundations of its ideas and legitimacy. The changing context of the welfare state has direct consequences for social work, and affects how it is perceived, and how it is valued as a profession and in its relationships within society (Lorenz 2005). Significantly, a changed welfare state has influence upon social work's mission, where changed beliefs about reciprocity, and a loss or weakening of public trust in historical social institutions, have challenged its identity and social value.

Other domestic factors have also influenced the position of disciplines such as social work within contemporary capitalism. Changes in the nature of the Australian workforce in terms of technology and its application, and in demography, have disrupted 19th Century industrial processes, and have fostered increased demands for workforce flexibility and altered industrial circumstances (Watts 1987). Evidence in the literature highlights the dismantling, restructuring and fiscal restriction of services and organisations which brings about the diminution of sophisticated structural understandings of individual contexts and social issues. This change has direct consequences for the ideas and practices of social work.

Neoliberal managerial practices have sought to change the organisational arrangements of social workers, either through new organisational structures, or by changing the basis of work from a sophisticated structural understanding of the individual in context to a proceduralised and routinised set of occupational tasks (Findlay & McCormack 2005; Baines 2006; Spolander, Engelbrecht & Pullen-Sansfaçon 2016). The combined effects have challenged the nature of social work and the organisational structures that surround it. What neoliberalism has produced is a managerial version of service functions.

The micro impacts of neoliberalism on industrial processes discussed in the literature highlight the ways in which social workers' roles, values and functions are being challenged (Ferguson, Lavalette & Whitmore 2005). Baines, (2006, 2010) highlights the impact of these changes in an Australian context, and their significance in terms of the day-to-day practices and processes of social workers. Baines (2008, 2010) and Mendes (2009) highlight changed organisational processes of accountability and service design in Australian social services, and document reduced levels of resourcing. These micro impacts of neoliberalism directly affect worker–client relationships. Where once the social work relationship was based on need and sophisticated structural understandings of an individual's context, this relationship is now increasingly replaced by proceduralised service requirements within a context of individual responsibility and efficiency (Ferguson, Lavalette & Whitmore 2005; McDonald & Gray 2006; Abramovitz & Zelnick 2015; Brenner & Fraser 2017).

THE MACRO IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON SOCIAL WORK

Neoliberalism has brought about broad structural changes within welfare institutions, their organisational frameworks and policy processes. For Harris (2003), social work's institutional and organisational legitimacy has been usurped, while for Gray (2004), social work has become the excluded and oppressed victim of managerialism and globalisation. Baines' (2006) research identifies that social workers feel strongly affected by numerous constraints on their work, at both the macro, structural level of the policy and organisational context, and at the micro, interpersonal level. At its broadest, the meaning of 'the social' is substantively altered in terms of how social workers can fulfil their mandate in the social dimension of public life (Lorenz 2005).

The neoliberal mechanisms of managerialism and marketisation, and their processes' use to promote and maintain a liberal market, have been effective tools of reconstructing both

the objectives of the non-government and government sectors, substituting individualism for collectivism, consumerism for the welfare state, and corporatisation and privatisation for public institutions (Harris 2003).

Jessop (2003) suggests that these act as forms of control in which, while the market remains largely unfettered, the public sector of welfare is being increasingly regulated through privatisation, fiscal restraint, and new processes of accountability and control, with social work's moral authority compromised as a result (Dominelli 1999). This penetration, in Dominelli's (1996) view, has made a radical alteration to both the organisation and value base of the welfare state, and has had a marked impact on social work agencies' structure and operation (Harris 2003; Ferguson 2008)

Fabricant and Burghardt (1992), in earlier research, conclude that these new managerial practices and structures expose workers to contradictory pressures and requirements, often resulting in service reduction due to neoliberal cost containment. For example, in the United Kingdom, 'market' rhetoric has displaced professional discretion with technocratic skills, and with a particular form of business thinking (Ferguson & Lavalette 2006).

European privatisation has seen a shift from central to local responsibility that has directly affected social workers and service users, creating chaotic, ineffectual and unfair service delivery, according to Carey (2008a). As far afield as post-apartheid South Africa (Sewpaul 2006) and Israel (Strier, Surkis & Biran 2008), the impact of neoliberal frameworks is clearly evident. Under neoliberalism, clients in Israeli 'welfare to work' programs have been trapped in a cycle of dependence on financial support from their families or from charitable organisations (Strier et al. 2008). This shift from public service social provision has resulted in the development of 'hired hands social work using locums and independent and self-employed practitioners' (Carey 2008a, p. 922), and has exacerbated social workers' frustration and uncertainty.

The literature also suggests that social work under new globalised social policy frameworks has been placed in an invidious position of having to uncritically conform to a set of political conditions in a manner antithetical to many of its principles. Fitzsimons (2000), for example, highlights that in New Zealand, neoliberal social policy initiatives have shifted focus from the collective to the individual, and have sought to reinvent the community in terms of social capital and social cohesion, while relocating social welfare to the

community as an individual responsibility. Social policy approaches that had been the mainstay of the post-war welfare state are now not only seen as ineffectual and counter-productive, but also as creating dependency, being prone to expensive errors, and counter-productive to the development of the individually responsible consumer.

A neoliberal initiative to reconfigure industrial relations within professions is prominent in the literature across many fields. This has been pursued through reshaping professions such as social work to individualised and consumerist models of practice. While it is recognised that social work has struggled historically to hold a position as an accepted profession, one of its major professional attributes has been its ability to develop effective relationships with clients (Dominelli 1996). This attribute has now become redundant, according to Harris (1999), where the 'bureau-professional' social worker is being replaced by a 'consumer-citizen' identity that signals the structural bypassing of the social worker relationship and reconfigured new types of customer service role. Rogowski (2011), similarly, argues that social workers are now confined within a managerial framework of neoliberal consumerism.

For Harris (1999), this highlights that not only has the usefulness of this knowledge and skill been eroded, but also, more profoundly, that what constitutes 'social citizenship' has been dramatically altered under neoliberalism. The need for theorists on poverty, racism and homophobia, for example, is replaced, Singh and Cowden (2009) suggest, by prescriptive, quantifiable provision of a service. In neoliberal terms, knowledge is useful only instrumentally, not intrinsically, or as a way to raise and deal with contested ideas and practices. In consequence, the ideas of social work are only valuable when they produce concrete actions that are measurable and repeatable. Theorising is thus a luxury that cannot be afforded in the context of the specific demands of practice, and consequently what is considered essential social work knowledge has been reconstructed (Harris 2003).

THE MICRO IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON SOCIAL WORK

While the literature shows clear representation of the structural impact of neoliberalism on social work, several studies highlight the effect of neoliberalism on social workers' vision, practice knowledge, skills and relationships (Ferguson 2004; Ferguson et al. 2006; Baines 2006, 2008, 2010; Rogowski 2010, 2011; Spolander et al. 2014; Abramovitz & Zelnick 2015). From the research, several main themes emerge: the de-valuing of social workers'

skills and knowledge; the transformation of social workers' relationships with clients; and social workers' compromised professional identity. Challenge to, or loss of, social workers' vision is another common theme in the literature, which often depicts a landscape with little opportunity to oppose neoliberalism's hegemony.

Findley and McCormick (2005) identify several areas of direct impact on social workers and clients. The tightening of criteria for client eligibility and the expansion of means testing have sought to exclude people from and limit access to services. Additionally, Findley and McCormick identify that the impact, more generally, has been to transfer financial responsibility from the state to individuals and families. Access and eligibility are linked to new industrial practices of enshrining new employment models through the development of a 'flexible' labour market.

In examining the intellectual activity within social work under conditions of neo-liberalism, Singh and Cowden (2009) found the erosion of what they described as 'bottom-up' social work. Increasingly, Singh and Cowden revealed, front-line social workers felt despair about the capacity to work with clients and communities outside of the managerial and regulatory framework. Hence, at a personal level, the impact of globalisation and marketisation has resulted in demoralisation, alienation and anger among social workers, according to Jones (cited in Ferguson & Lavalette 2004), with particular grievances about funding, restructuring, and the overpowering of social work's vision. Baines' (2006) study draws out the dilemmas of practice, the difficulty of resisting, and the loss of vision.

Research by McDonald and Chenoweth (2009, p. 144), in the Australian context, shows that reform of Centrelink (a statutory agency providing income security benefits) has led to a managerialist framework of institutional change which has the capacity to seriously destabilise social work, 'particularly in that [Centrelink] promote[s] values and rationalities at odds with those assumed by the profession'. Given the scale and dimension of the impact, many social workers try to shield themselves from the changes by focusing on therapeutic and clinical work, where they can use their professional methods and try to ignore changing service delivery designs (Lorenz 2005).

The literature suggests that what had been assumed as the essential knowledge and skills of social workers have been significantly challenged. Ritzer (2000) interprets the reconstruction of skills and knowledge through the prism of 'McDonaldisation'. According to Dustin (2007), this process involves the replacement of conventional skills and knowledge

with neoliberal requirements for efficiency, calculability, predictability and control through non-human technology – which has a certain synergy with social workers' circumstances.

Neoliberal managerial processes also come with specific requirements of language and the construction (and definition) of knowledge. According to Davies and Petersen (2005, p. 1), the danger:

> in adopting this neoliberal language [is that] we don't know, and we haven't known for some time, whether we have just adopted some superficial and laughable language that will appease government, or whether the professional knowledge that guides and informs teaching and learning is reshaped in neoliberal terms.

Consistent with the impact of neoliberalism on social workers' knowledge and skills is a deleterious impact on job role, occupations, and professional identity (McDonald & Jones 2000). For many social workers, this impact has been predicated upon a new consumerist model of social service delivery, and on the consequent transformation of the accepted beliefs of social work (Carey 2008a).

Research on the impact of neoliberalism on frontline social workers in local authorities in the United Kingdom uncovered high levels of demoralisation and alienation, predicated on a shift from 'depth' to 'surface' social work (Howe 1994). Similarly, Ferguson (2004) identified a simplified neoliberal social work of 'what works' becoming a dominant practice philosophy while hiding its essentialist behaviourism.

Writers have conceptualised this shift in social work practice in various ways. Harris (2003) sees it as the emergence of 'the social work business'. For Healy and Meagher (2004, p. 257), social work has to deal with 'increasing fiscal constraint and rapidly changing modes of public administration in the sector, and with the entrenched cultural devaluation of caring work'. Carey (2008a) argues that neoliberalism has created a matrix of administrative minutiae; contract management, assessment protocols, case plans and an impenetrable regulatory framework. The micro practice of social work has been reconstructed according to the notion of competencies: a 'set of highly technical, de-contextualised practice skills' (Dominelli 1996, p. 163), with the consequence being the routinising of tasks and processes, reducing discretion, and allowing the employment of a less skilled workforce.

Brandt and Bouverne-De Brie (2009, p. 113) confirm that 'it has become increasingly clear that the emancipatory capacity of social work has been eroded'. Similarly, Baines' (2006) study demonstrated an erosion of social workers' traditional professional knowledge

and skills. Parton (2008, p. 253) notes that social work skills and practices have been transformed over the past 30 years, such that 'social work now operates less on the terrain of the "social" and more on the terrain of the "informational"'. As Singh and Cowden (2009, p. 12) point out, neoliberalism 'attempts to de-intellectualise social work and characterise it simply as a set of competencies'. It also attempts to destroy social work's emancipatory and critical potential.

Harlow (2003) argues that the organisational practices of managerialism have replaced and corrupted other approaches to social service and the philosophies that underpin them, resulting in a loss of emotional content from social work practice. In social workers' day-to-day practice, client–social worker relationships have been reconstructed on a basis of market individualism, individualised models of funding, and through a reconstruction of need as risk (Baines 2006; McDonald 2008). For many social workers, the impact of neoliberalism on practice relationships often required them to clothe it:

> within the language of consumerist managerialism, epitomised by the obsession with performance management and targets, preoccupations which undercut the capacity of social workers to critically address and support people who are their clients (Singh & Cowden 2009, p. 11).

For Harris (1999, p. 932), neoliberalism has orchestrated the 'dominance of bureau-professional regimes in the social democratic welfare state in the interests of customers rooted in the marketisation and managerialisation of welfare'. This reconstruction of professional relationships in social work is one concern raised in McDonald's (2005) study, which found evidence of the displacement of feminist models by neoliberal models of service delivery in domestic violence services. Similarly, as Abramovitz and Zelnick (2015) point out, the reconstruction of relationships and their attuning to neoliberal work practices has become a significant issue for social workers in the USA. These new practices reflect a pathologising and individualising of issues, and the replacement of social and political rights with clinical case management.

While the literature identifies broad concerns about the impact of neoliberalism in organisational and structural terms, with detailed interpretation of the micro impact on social workers, there has been less exploration of the infiltration of social work as a project by neoliberalism, and of the ways in which social work has contributed to the new neoliberal social institutions. This might suggest that not only are social workers, victims of neoliberalism, but they also appear very adaptable, and perhaps amenable, to its influence.

Lorenz (2005) expresses the view that social workers exhibit an ambiguous role in relation to neoliberalism. This ambiguity has meant social work engaging in processes previously considered anathema to its underlying philosophies. Brandt and Bouverne-DeBie (2009, p. 113), for example, identify that, in the context of youth justice, 'social work has not only been the victim of recent changes, but that it has also withdrawn from the debate on youth justice', leaving the policy space open to neoliberal ideas.

Carey (2008b) argues that neoliberalism has penetrated the mind of social workers at both conscious and unconscious levels, to the extent that they are often unable to recognise forms of social work that are outside the neoliberal agenda. Some social workers are unable to step outside of a neoliberal consciousness to critically reflect on the impact of managerialist discourses on their practice. However, Harris and White (2009) argue that while all social workers are subjected to neoliberal discourses, there remains a capacity to resist its advances.

SOCIAL WORK'S RESPONSE TO NEOLIBERALISM

Social work has been unable to avoid responding to neoliberalism (Garrett 2009). The breadth of the issues faced by social work under neoliberalism are significant, but there is still conjecture about the nature of the challenges it faces and its possible responses (Leonard 1997; Mendes 2003; Ferguson 2004; Gray 2011). The literature suggests that social work and social workers have dealt with neoliberalism in a range of ways in various places. The question of how social work might or should respond to neoliberalism has created an uncertainty (Gray 2005). This uncertainty and anxiety about social work's prospects under neoliberalism has often fuelled compliance, with workers seeing little alternative but to accommodate its requirements, albeit reluctantly. The literature suggests that, as a consequence, social workers are less active in forms of resistance and activism, either through lack of opportunity, limited political awareness, or limited processes through which to act (Baines 2006).

Resistance by social workers is evidenced in a number of sources. Baines' (2006) research, exploring the nature of resistance by social workers against neoliberalism in Canada and Australia, shows evidence of resistance by workers to aspects of neoliberal organisational practice. There is, in her view, less evidence that social workers were likely to draw together broader connections between social circumstances and globalisation processes. The literature

suggests that social work has been caught up with and influenced by neoliberal ideas and practices, and that this has led to the accommodation of those ideas and practices, but also to aspects of them being ignored or resisted.

Similarly, Findley and McCormick (2005) report that, while there is some evidence of social workers' awareness of global issues, they show less insight into the structural issues of globalisation that surround them. Their study suggests that micro acts of practice seem to be more fertile ground for response by social workers than broad political and social campaigning. Resistance, in their view, is muted by a limited engagement with broader social issues that have consequences for their clients. The notion of resisting neoliberal changes is made difficult not only by the ideology's seeming omnipotence, but also by social workers' unfamiliarity with political acts of social resistance. Turiel (2003) argues that the notion resistance has negative connotations, and is seen in the public consciousness as a forlorn act of anti-social behaviour. Turiel (2003, p. 115) goes on to explain that resistance and subversion are part of everyday life, and are 'integral to the process of development', where accommodating and resisting change are parts of all responses.

Resistance, however, becomes more likely when fundamental values and beliefs are challenged, and where there is a discordance between ideas and practices that are seen as fundamentally conflicting. In this regard, it is argued that taking a laissez-faire approach to neoliberalism, and seeking to ride out its advances, presents specific dangers. As Singh and Cowden (2009, p. 12) point out, neoliberalism's 'attempts to de-intellectualise social work and characterise it simply as a set of competencies' place social work in danger of losing 'those critical elements within the social work tradition which prevent its reconstruction in the image of neoliberalism'.

Using notions of power to uncover, confront and resist neoliberalism is a key element for social workers in their roles, according to Singh and Cowden (2009). Similarly, Jordan (1990, cited in Harris 1999, p. 933) concludes that resistance forms part of social workers' process, for even if they cannot resolve citizenship issues:

> social work can at least bear witness to injustice and refuse to collude with the exclusion or coercion of service users that would not be practiced on members of more advantaged groups.

Singh and Cowden (2009, p. 14) extend this, citing identifying social workers as intellectuals as key to developing mechanisms of resistance and resilience, and arguing that this may revitalise their professionalism.

Harris (1999, p. 933) argues that the possibility of social resistance in social work is tied up with the development of new alliances in which 'social workers are committed to learning from citizens, and to working within and against the quasi-market'. This is a view supported by Beresford and Croft (2004), who argue that the ambiguity and uncertainty of social workers' position requires them to develop lines of resistance through alliances with service users and their organisations and movements to overcome the new hegemony of individualism.

White (2009) suggests a more thoughtful response, claiming that social work has spaces for resistance to the neoliberal agenda within the existing frameworks of power. These involve being in and against neoliberalism through social work. She argues that neoliberalism can be interrupted and disturbed through the affordances of professional discretion, which does not require resistance on a grand scale (through anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation protests, say), but rather acts of rebellion by individual workers who challenge and reinterpret managerialist discourses and procedures.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has identified a range of impacts of neoliberalism, some structural and others instrumental, and has provided evidence of the universal impact of neoliberalism across broad sectors of society. The chapter gave a brief outline of the macro and micro impacts of neoliberalism on social work. The concerns raised in the literature show direct consequences for social work's mission, ideas and approaches, which creates anxiety and confusion about social work's role and expectations.

Along with these structural changes, there have been sets of micro impacts that affect the day-to-day work of social workers and their relationships with citizens. These changes have been dominated by processes that draw social work into new organisational roles, bounded by processes of scrutiny and market consumerism. For social work, this has often meant a reluctant acceptance and compliance with the new managerial structures and processes. These broad structural changes go to the heart of social work's identity and

professionalism, and have created concern and anxiety, both about the nature of the changes, and about the lack of a defined process of response.

At a micro level, social workers have been involved in the detailed interpretation of neoliberal practices, where the individualisation of practice and the new forms of accountability challenge both the intent of social work, and require new skills and processes. These micro impacts detail the infiltration of social work by neoliberalism, and the ways in which social work has contributed to the new neoliberal social institutions. This body of literature suggests that not only are social workers resistant to neoliberalism, but also that they appear very adaptable, and at times amenable, to its influence (Jordan 2004).

The selected academic material raises multiple dilemmas for social work, both in its desire and its ability to respond to neoliberalism. A fundamental change under neoliberalism to the way in which consent is understood undermines social work's principles of consensus. This has resulted in changes to the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state, and, for that matter, between social work and the state. These changes reflect a distinct reversal of both the nature and objective of previous relationships with the state for citizens and social workers alike. While social work faces opposition to its ideas and practices, it also faces challenge to its value and identity within the community. A derisive neoliberal commentary has undermined social work's social value, and the aggressive pursuit of a new neoliberal individualism has drawn it to relationships based on the responsibilisation of the individual. Neoliberal post-industrial models of knowledge and proceduralism within new work arrangements act contrary to social work's professional identity. Where once it was at least partially secured with an industrial model, supported to some degree by the state, where discrete professions, specialised knowledge and expertise went somewhat unchallenged, the neoliberal state has reconstructed professionalism along managerial, market lines.

Social work is not alone in having to meet these challenges – many disciplines formulated in the Fordist industrial age have found their identity and credentialing systems evaporating under neoliberal managerialism. Like many professions, social work has had to deal with a changed and restructured set of policy frameworks and institutions. Like many professions, social work has had to search for its continued relevance and existence, where ideals of justice and collectivism have given way to efficiency, accountability and a new regulatory regime focused on individualised responses as social ends in themselves.

While these circumstances are different, they are not new to social work. Much of the profession's history reflects working within the confines of a mismatch between its own values and those of the state. What marks neoliberal dominance as different is the way it has significantly withdrawn the imprimatur of the state which aligned, to some degree, with social work's values and social policy objectives.

This chapter has introduced the ways in which neoliberalism has affected social work. The literature forms a background against which to examine the deeper cultural hegemonic processes of neoliberalism, and provides a basis for understanding the impact of neoliberalism on social work. This cultural exploration is aimed at uncovering the convoluted and changeable nature of the neoliberal project, and at determining the opportunities available to social work in the Australian context.

CHAPTER 4
A NEO-GRAMSCIAN PERSPECTIVE ON NEOLIBERALISM

The exploration of the nature of neoliberalism in Chapter 2 highlighted a range of complex and divergent interpretations. This chapter explores a critical theoretical approach as a way to understand more fully neoliberalism's nature and implications for social work. When considering a critical approach to research, there are a number of important factors, particularly in the context of the divergences that appear in the nature and implications of neoliberalism. It is assumed to be fundamental, in any critical theoretical analysis, that the historical context that has given rise to neoliberalism is considered in some detail, both as a process of engaging with its historical formulation and as a way of understanding the tenets of its continued dexterity. At its broadest, it reflects a desire to understand something of the historical landscape of contemporary capitalism, and to examine the ways in which it is both divergent from, and similar to, previous ideological eras.

This research argues that understanding contemporary capitalism involves examining its particular cultural forms of ideological development that have given rise to new forms of subjectivity. It is considered that one of the benefits of drawing on critical theory for this study is its inductive approach to understanding and knowledge construction. This approach is considered to provide an enviable position from which to understand the convolutions and complexities of contemporary neoliberal forms. This inductive approach is applied in order to develop a praxis with which to understand neoliberalism's impact, drawn from theoretical ideas and from the experience of individuals.

Critical theory is not, however, a unified perspective, with a distinct approach and methodology, but one that offers a range of theoretical threads. It is distinguished from positivist theory in its efforts to bring about social change. Its efforts are charged with the intention of liberating individuals and creating a world that satisfies human needs and unleashes the power of human beings. In this way, critical theory is focused on the totality of society, its historical development, and the mechanisms of power. It draws on perspectives in social sciences to bring together ways of understanding society. In this chapter, I will argue that a critical perspective offers a method of analysis that is both coherent and expansive in its ability to unravel the complexities of neoliberalism.

Social work has had a long engagement with critical theory, which has had an influence on its ideas and practices throughout its history (Galper 1975; Bailey & Brake 1975; Ife 1997; Fook & Pease 1999; Fook 2002; Ferguson & Lavalette 2006; Ferguson 2008; Garrett 2009; Mullaly 2010; Madhu 2011). This chapter provides a brief introduction to critical theory and social work, and, while cognisant of a range of theoretical approaches, has placed its main focus on earlier Marxian writings by Antonio Gramsci. There are commonalities between critical and Gramscian accounts of cultural reproduction within society. It is argued here that Gramscian and neo-Gramscian approaches have much to offer in explaining and analysing contemporary consumer capitalism's ways of developing its power and maintaining capitalist hegemony. A neo-Gramscian approach offers the ability to uncover both the structural and ideological elements of neoliberalism. It affords us the opportunity to engage with the cultural and political complexities of the subject, drawing on a form of praxis where ideas and lived experience form the basis for analysis, rather than theoretical abstractions.

While recognising the predominance of the economic interpretation of neoliberalism within the literature, this research argues that a theoretical approach must also detail the complex interplay between cultural and political processes as part of the make-up of neoliberalism. This, in part, is justified by the identification of the new forms of contemporary capitalism as cultural reproduction (Jessop 2006; Cox 1999). For Gill, (2008, p. 124) the 'present world order involves a more "liberalised" and commodified set of historical structures, driven by the restructuring of capital and a shift, politically, to the right'. The result has been an expansion and reapplication of liberal economic ideals and the construction of the individual as the centre point of both politics and action.

This chapter draws together elements of a broadly neo-Gramscian critical research framework that reflects upon the core tenets of Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. My analysis draws together structural and cultural elements to examine neoliberal hegemony and its impact on social work in Australia.

THE CASE FOR A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

It is usual for a theory chapter such as this to provide a framework and justification for the argument being pursued, and in that regard this thesis is no different. However, a critical

approach to theory offers more than a detached, rational appraisal of a particular historical situation, and acts, instead, as a vehicle to bring about change (Malpas & Wake 2006).

As Guess (1987) highlights, the great advantage of critical theory is its inherent emancipatory potential, aimed at producing enlightenment and developing new forms of knowledge. Unlike positivist knowledge production, which objectifies experiences in an effort to capture lived experience within a hypothetical framework, critical theory takes a reflective approach that challenges the construction of beliefs and knowledge. The marvel of critical theory, in Guess's (1987, p. 55) analysis, is its ability to develop awareness rather than just to quantify. Critical theory seeks to make agents aware of hidden coercion, thereby freeing them from that coercion and putting them in a position to determine where their true interests lie.

Critical inquiry is, therefore, by its very nature, exploratory and inductive, reflecting on experiences and ideas as a way of developing new theoretical understandings of a subject. This contradicts conventional positivist approaches, which hypothesise a theoretical understanding and draw deductively on empirical data to establish conclusions. What critical theory provides is both a way of exploring the world and an approach to analysis, drawing on a dialectical method of understanding. Within a critical approach, dialectical methods highlight the contradictions and crises inherent within ideas and competing perspectives and arguments. The exploratory nature of dialectical research creates a unique position from which to view and explore both the nature of the subject and the possibility of change.

In my view, a dialectical research approach provides a substantive way of exploring the crisis and contradictions within neoliberal ideology, and the conflicted nature of its impact. A dialectical method considers the meaning and value of ideas set within social relationships where they remain interwoven and contain multiple contradictions, providing a dynamic interplay of opposites. O'Connor (2003) concludes that a critical approach commences with a contradiction that forms the basis for contemplation, rather than seeing this contradiction as the 'dead end' perceived by conventional theoretical approaches.

A significant advantage of a dialectical approach to theory is that it does not edify abstraction, but provides a constructive way of approaching the complex nature of complex topics, such as neoliberalism. Fundamentally, it offers more than an explanation of phenomena, but rather a way of exploring the complexities and process of the production of knowledge and ideas, and challenges the axiomatic nature of, in this case, neoliberalism. The

challenge for critical theory is to question the origins and processes of change, and to identify how existing structures, institutions, beliefs and practices contribute to the processes of change and maintenance (Cox 1981).

Structural theoretical accounts have their roots in a materialist interpretation of capitalism and social change. Marxist accounts have provided a definitive materialist interpretation of capitalism, in which economic determinist interpretations of capitalism examine class as the basis of capital accumulation. In more recent times, Marxist accounts have been heavily scrutinised for their lack of recognition of forces beyond class as influences on the development of modern capitalism (Giddens 1981).

The change in the nature of contemporary capitalism, where it seemingly allows forms of limited variation in a trade-off for monotheistic allegiance, suggests for critical writers a watershed moment in the manner of capitalism's operation and methods. It represents a shift from Fordist production-based capitalism to a globalised monopoly consumer capitalism and the manner of its methods of expansion (Malpas et al. 2006).

The Frankfurt School, post-World War II, sought to contemporise Marxism in the face of new social and political developments. Critical theory is grounded in social reality rather than abstraction, and is aimed at providing a theoretical framework and tools for social change in the face of the seeming ideological sophistication of 'contemporary capitalism' (Malpas et al. 2006). The transfiguring of contemporary capitalism raised questions about Marxist accounts of the role of the individual. Whereas in conventional Marxism the alienation of individuals is the result of domination by the ruling class, Marcuse identifies the difficulty of such an interpretation of alienation when citizens interacting, developing identity, and finding satisfaction are integral to the process (Marcuse 1991). For Marcuse (1991), this presented a dark foreboding of a new ideological process in which the 'false consciousness' of individuals was replaced by a consciousness obviated by the absorption of ideology into reality, and a more heightened role for ideological processes than is evidenced in the previous industrial culture.

The challenge for critical thought has been the division between structural materialist interpretations and critical discourse approaches. (Malpas et al. 2006) These new accounts of capitalism not only represent a diversion from fundamental Marxism, but also an engagement with cultural forms of reproduction, highlighting new types of social relations (Malpas et al. 2006). The tension reflects both recognition of the cultural and symbolic nature of power,

oppression and global political economy, and the shift in critical thinking towards questions of symbolism and discourse (Gal 1989). Contemporary capitalism has been able to envelop individual cultural expression as a process of monotheistic attachment to capitalism.

The new focus and substantial literature on cultural reproduction and subjectivities in critical theory have also highlighted concerns about the manner in which capitalism combines, reforms and reinvents itself in periods of neoliberal advance (Larner 2006). The tension between structure and agency in critical theory remains unresolved, and, for some forms, an uncomfortable duality where on the one hand structural accounts have remained tied to determinist accounts of historical materialism, and, on the other, post-structural 'rule of rules' accounts have been viewed as inadequate in explaining the material conditions of everyday life. In this context, the aim of the study is to explore how the issues and tensions that are both evident and subterranean in the neoliberal context come to light in this analysis and provide the opportunity for social change.

SOCIAL WORK AND CRITICAL THEORY

Social work has historically demonstrated a capacity for critiquing social arrangements, and sought to intervene in circumstances that created inequality and disadvantage (Reisch et al. 2001; Selmi & Hunter 2001). Social work, however, has many threads but has often reflected a pragmatic activity conditioned by the structure of the society. In consequence, critical social work has never been the most dominant approach (Hegar 2012).

Radical and later critical perspectives in social work have been strongly reflected in the theorising of an emancipatory role, and as a definitive practice approach of social work. These critical influences, while essentially British and American in origin, experienced a groundswell of enthusiasm and innovation in Australia (Tomlinson 1982; Thorpe & Petruchenia 1992; Ife 1997: Fook 2002, 2007, 2012; Allen, Briskman & Pease 2009; Pease & Fook 1999, 2010).

Early critical representations reflected a predominantly Marxist analysis, based on notions of structural emancipation. This view elevated the philosophical synergy between social work's emancipatory mission and critical theory's focus on structural social change. Critical theory thus places significant emphasis on reflecting upon how dominant ideologies, ways of thinking, and societal institutions affect people's lives (Allen et al. 2009.) Critical theory also questions the place of existing institutions, such as the family, educational

establishments, and government, with a view to constructing a more just society. For Marxists, the state in advanced capitalism operates to maintain the circumstances and conditions of those oppressed by capitalism. Social work, as a function of the state, contributes to this (Leonard 1995).

By the 1970s, social work theorising and practice approaches had developed arguments against the process of exploitation inherent in capitalism in post-war welfare states. Social work has sought to challenge the oppressive role of the state under capitalism through the development of structural social work that supports the social and political interests of individuals and groups, and seeks to challenge the structural causes of oppression. Social work's objective, from a structural perspective, has been to develop an analysis of capitalism, to critique capitalism's notions of power and disadvantage, and to encourage responses that empower individuals and groups (Allen et al. 2009).

For Moreau (1979), structural social work was concerned with the ways in which powerful interests in society have controlled and constrained those who are disadvantaged, and sought to attack poverty and oppression at the root. Many found inspiration in the work and practice of Paulo Freire, who was neither therapeutic, reformist, nor determinist Marxist in approach (Freire 1993).

More recently, critical social work has developed a more reflexive position on what is envisioned as a new epoch of post-modernity. The stabilities of the past, and belief in the processes of modernism and the enlightenment have been framed not as fixed positions, but as dominant but competing discourses. By the 1990s, social work was examining the way in which societal narratives were culturally produced, and the way they were reflected in embedded notions of class, gender, community and society (Mullaly 2010; Pease 2000; Fook 1999; Fraser 1989). Howe (1994), for example, views post-modernity as a cultural narrative based on presumptions about history, progress and causal truths. He considers its key elements to be rejection of universalist explanations of society and its 'truths', and the reformulation of the notion of participation as having only contextual meaning. He argues that power is reflected in meaning creating contexts, and that it is the narratives that bind understandings. Post-modern ideas have a vibrant representation in the social work theory literature (Dominelli 1996; Ife 1997; Pease & Fook 1999; Fook 1999, 2002).

Postmodern critical approaches differ from structural neo-Marxist accounts by placing emphasis on issues of identity and the processes of subjugation through meta narratives and

discourse. While neo-Marxist theory rejects post-modern claims of a-historicism and anti-determinism, post-modern claims about the nature of contemporary capitalism have gained considerable momentum and support in academic circles in the past three decades.

A central critique, however, of post-modern critical perspectives focuses on their perceived loss of a structural historical connection. Jamieson (1991), for example, sees Post-modernism as the inevitable product of contemporary capitalism. He argues that, as a theoretical perspective, its focus is on the processes of society and identity, rather than on broader issues of poverty and oppression. Bauman (1992) similarly argues that post-industrial capitalism has produced an unstable post-modern world, which theory has imitated. Post-modernists' rejection of deterministic accounts of history reflects an opposition to the very concept of modernity and grand theory, which, they argue, represent little more than constructed narratives.

This dissertation recognises the critiques of both conventional Marxist theory and post-modern accounts, and has chosen to draw on a neo-Gramscian approach to render an analysis that countenances both structure and agency (Jessop, 1997). According to Hall (1991), what neo-Gramscian theory offers is the ability to maintain structural notions of oppression, and to countenance cultural processes within society, which escapes the determinism of Marxist accounts of history. Gramsci avoids the duality of structure versus agency through the use of the processes of hegemony and of an integral society.

A GRAMSCIAN PERSPECTIVE ON HEGEMONY

While the Frankfurt School represented perhaps the most significant change in the interpretation of Marx, Antonio Gramsci, some 50 years earlier, provided a new interpretation of many Marxian concepts. For Gramsci, Marx's interpretation of ideology and its role within society did not account sufficiently for his witnessing of workers aligning themselves with Fascism in pre-war Italy, against their interests. In Gramsci's (1971) view, society was not determinist, nor simply materialist in interpretation, but rather was a process in which contestation is inherent, ongoing, and involves cultural factors within the political and social context. Neither determinist nor fatalist accounts of history are plausible, for in both, history occurs in spite of individuals. Gramsci's (1971, p. 445) reflections speak more broadly of the limitations of determinism in ontological terms:

> It might seem that there can exist an extra-historical and extra-human objectivity. But who is the judge of such objectivity? […] Man [humanity] knows objectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race historically unified in a single unitary cultural system.

Gramsci's (1971) approach to this dilemma was to consider Marxist materialist accounts as limited in their historically pre-determined view of social change, where individuals play little part through their own agency. While not rejecting Marx's economic structural approach to capitalist society, Gramsci perceived that human and cultural factors play a significant role in the establishment of a dominant capitalist order. Capitalist oppression, he argued, rather than just being the result of dominance formed by economic position, and the creating of a false consciousness within the population, was formed through the 'soft' institutions in the cultural space of society. This reflected a cultural hegemony where individuals acted to contribute to a social consensus. His efforts to try to reconcile, in part, the questions of structure and agency, offer an account that enables both structural and cultural factors to be included in an analysis. The next section of this chapter explores these aspects of Gramsci's ideas.

Within Gramsci's work (1971), analysis is not reduced to a merely economic interpretation of capitalism, but also identifies the contestation between different elements in society, within a historical epoch. The key to understanding Gramsci's interpretation of society is the manner in which he understands ideology and ideological processes. Gramsci's use of the concept of ideological 'hegemony', or the way in which individuals within society could knowingly support processes that were against their interests, reflects a more complex and dynamic process than Marx's idea of 'false consciousness'.

According to Cox (1983, p. 163), Gramsci's significant contribution to the concept of hegemony is in the way he has applied it to the notion of bourgeois society. Hegemony is maintained through 'concessions to subordinate classes in return for acquiescence to bourgeois leadership' (Cox 1983, p. 163). In this way, social democracy became the product of a hegemonic process of concessions to preserve capital accumulation. For capitalism, the beauty of hegemonic processes is that they did not require the direct running of the state by the bourgeoisie (Cox 1983).

The process of ideological hegemonic consent, from Gramsci's perspective, involves the development of a conventional wisdom or common sense, which is inculcated within the population at large and embedded in language, beliefs, views and values; a spontaneous

folklore mobilised in the service of a particular social group in the creation or maintenance of a particular hegemony (Jackson Lears 1985). For Gramsci, the dominant classes use the apparatus of the state to both enforce and manufacture consent within the everyday lived experiences of citizens. Gramsci, to this end, draws a broad notion of the state, not limited to just institutional formulations, but which also includes those 'soft' elements of civil society. In Gramsci's view, civil society is not fixed or pre-determined, but represents the political processes of manufacturing consent within a hegemonic historical bloc in the interests of the ruling class.

Gramsci (1971) conceived of hegemony as both a process and a strategic position, albeit tentative and vulnerable to change, with the ever-present possibility of 'counter-hegemony' arising. Cultural hegemony as a process becomes the way in which ideology is inculcated into the 'common sense' of society. Hegemony formation is a constant strategic process to maintain and renew complex, difficult and often uncertain ideological positions. Gramsci (1971) considered that ideology works to align people to boundaries and ideas through a language of an accepted common sense, which discourages engagement with alternatives while making it difficult to interpret personal discord and act upon it (Jackson Lears 1985). This ideological hegemonic process, according to Gramsci, reflects a dialectical process in which the 'common sense' of a dominant way of life prevails and thought is diffused and replicated and informs beliefs, values and commitments.

Hegemony is seen as spontaneously constructed, in Gramsci's (1971) analysis, through the cultural instruments of the state. The state functions to retain a coercive role to protect dominant interests via its political apparatus, which forms a cloak of coercion to protect a hegemony (Jackson Lears 1985). The process of manufacturing consent in civil society occurs through 'traditional intellectuals', those who develop the orthodoxy of the dominant view and represent the ruling classes. For Gramsci, this ideological process is fluid, a formed and reformed 'common sense', framed by the ruling class but contested in people's lived experience.

Gramsci's approach to critical theory is to seek to account for both the structure and everyday experiences that make up social relations. In Gramsci's (1971, p. 367) description:

> Structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man [humanity], assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives.

The idea of ‘historical blocs’ in Gramsci’s writing represents both the outcome of the process of ideological acceptance and the ongoing process of contestation to maintain a hegemony. Historical blocs are continually changing and being challenged through counter-hegemonic ideas and actions. Within ‘historical blocs’, mechanisms of accommodation, coercion, co-option and disruption are used to maintain hegemony. ‘Historical blocs’ are not simply the result of a hegemony based on ideological common sense from within civil society, because they also reflect the formal institutions of the state in capitalist society. These formal institutions act to develop and maintain the seemingly spontaneous process of consent, and respond to nullify counter-hegemonic activities. For Gramsci, the only space available to citizens to challenge a hegemonic historical bloc is in the informal realm of civil society.

While Gramsci’s analysis offers a materialist account of capitalism, his work highlights the complex processes of conjunctural crises that extend beyond a merely economic analysis. Hegemony, in Gramsci’s view, is by its nature contested through the forces and contradictions of its complex practices and language. The distinctive characteristics of a particular historical hegemony are set within the historical and social configurations that frame its ‘conjuncture’ (Hall 2011). In Gramsci’s interpretation, civil society is not a passive form of non-political space, but rather a contested and changing politico-cultural space, where ideology is persuaded and counter-posed, coalesced and resisted. This dynamic process does not require active participation in developing a ‘common sense’, nor does it require commitment; it can tolerate a degree of disaffection. Its hegemonic nature and process of ‘common sense’ make it difficult to challenge directly. When challenges occur, they generally do not need to be repressed directly. The form of response to things that are considered un-secured or potentially dangerous is often co-option and assimilation. These act as more effective ways to maintain hegemonic dominance (Jackson Lears 1985).

The contested nature of hegemony, Gramsci (1971) suggests, provides the possibility of opposition and the development of counter-hegemony. This contestation within hegemony gives rise to an ideological double movement, where on the one hand a hegemonic order seeks to maintain its unchallenged dominance, but on the other has to contradictorily assimilate ideas and patterns of society that threaten its existence in order to maintain itself. Opposing forces, while they might be dealt with by the coercive political state to maintain hegemony, require an ideological counter. Hegemony informs and instigates a counter

movement that makes hegemonic forces realign and reorganise in response. The vanguard of this process in capitalist society, Gramsci argues, are the 'traditional intellectuals' who manage ruling class social and economic interests and create and reconfigure the 'common sense' of the ideology. Opposition comes from what Gramsci describes as 'organic intellectuals', those who represent the interests of the subordinate classes, and who seek to develop and instil a counter-hegemonic common sense.

Critiques of Gramsci often suggest his *Prison Notebooks*, collected from letters he wrote while in prison in Italy in the 1930s, present a disjointed theoretical account. They argue that the circumstances of his imprisonment, particularly his lack of access to literature, may have been responsible for the variation in his concepts across the notebooks. However, a closer look at Gramsci's writing suggests that a fixed definition of many of his ideas is inconsistent with his historical and dialectical approach to the subject matter. As Cox (1999, p. 5) points out, Gramsci's:

> concepts are derived from his perceptions of reality and they serve not only to seize the momentary essence of a changing reality but also to become intellectual tools for fomenting change.

According to Cox (1999), reading Gramsci only as an academic theorist fails to recognise the value of his analysis of the historical context. His critical approach is located in his concern with developing ideas as tools for more emancipatory and pragmatic application of theory. His work expands on Marxist analysis, offering a structural and cultural examination. Gramsci provides an unresolved blend of cultural agency and structure. His work, however, has its critics, those who accuse it of being too structural, or of being too accommodating of class oppressions (Simon 1991; Strinati 1995; Houston 2002). Others seek to isolate Gramsci's ideas, suggesting that they only apply to 1930s Italy, and warning against unreflective interpretations of Gramsci in a contemporary context (Malpas et al. 2006). While effort is required to avoid a narrow reading of Gramsci, it must be remembered that his work was intended, substantially, to be a broad analysis of capitalism.

A NEO-GRAMSCIAN APPROACH TO NEOLIBERALISM

There is a dense and diverse neo-Gramscian literature that supports the currency of Gramsci's ideas for contemporary society. Neo-Gramscian ideas figure prominently in fields as diverse as international political economy (Cox 1983; Clarke 2006, 2007; Katz

2006; Gill 2008, 2012; Hall 2011), education (Mayo 1994; Buttergeig 1995; Mayo & Craig 1995), and language and cultural studies (Hall 1985; Hall & O'Shea 2013).

Neo-Gramscian ideas and analysis are less prominent, however, in the literature of social work (Freire 1993; Ledwith 2001; Leonard et al. 2004; Garrett 2008 2009). Authors have pointed to the relevance of Gramscian concepts to the analysis of neoliberal ideas and practices over several decades (Gal 1989; Clarke & Newman 1997; Burrawoy 2003; Gill 2003, 2008; Clarke 2005; Larner 2006; Hall 2011). Their analysis, in the context of this research, provides support for the idea of a neo-Gramscian approach as a constructive framework for analysing neoliberalism and its impact on social work.

Bieler and Morton (2003) highlight a range of neo-Gramscian ideas, and suggest that their conceptual advantage is in providing a historical specificity to capitalism, and a site for exploring the contemporary relations of production. A neo-Gramscian approach in the context of contemporary capitalism affords the opportunity to expand our view of the nature of these relations, and to include questions about the reproduction of knowledge, institutions, and broader social relations.

One of the specific advantages of neo-Gramscian thinking is the way in which it treats the relationship between structure and agency. While other critical approaches seem destined to be hedged on one side of the structure/agency debate or the other, Gramsci's conception seeks to draw a correlation between them, and to see them as interwoven. This dialectical possibility of agency within a structural account addresses both the determinism of conventional materialist accounts, and the possibility of emancipatory change often lacking in subjective theory-based approaches.

A neo-Gramscian analysis offers a way of interpreting the impact of social relations and how they are connected to a dominant neoliberal world order. These social relations are centred on the neoliberal state, through its political institutions and into the fabric of civil society. The state, in a Gramscian account, operates as a fortress, with civil society as its outer wall. This is a useful way of understanding the social relations between the dominant hegemonic bloc, civil society, and the citizen. This thesis argues that a neo-Gramscian interpretation gives the opportunity to examine how civil society and the state have been remade under neoliberalism, and analyses the methods of ideological production within a historical bloc. The theoretical conception within this study argues that exploring how contemporary capitalism relies on neoliberal processes

of cultural reproduction explains both its impact, and the way in which it has worked to hail[4] social work.

Social work is inevitably linked, through its position within civil society, to the cultural processes of neoliberal hegemony. Civil society has acted as a central point for the formation of social work's ideas, values and beliefs, and as a connecting point between citizens and the state. This has created a conflicted position, because while social work is involved in the processes of the ideological hegemony under the state, it has also maintained an emancipatory role. The benefit of a neo-Gramscian analysis is that, while it details the hegemonic processes of the figuring and refiguring of norms, institutions and processes within a broader neoliberal world order, it unravels the possibilities of exploring and developing an emancipatory response (Bieler & Morton 2003). A neo- Gramscian perspective does not, however, offer us a unified conception of neoliberalism, nor a discrete formula or method of analysis. What it does provide is an approach that engages with the economic, cultural and political elements that go to form neoliberal hegemony, and a way of comprehending the construction, maintenance, and revision of material ideas.

HEGEMONY, IDEOLOGY AND HISTORICAL BLOCS

Neo-Gramscian notions of hegemony highlight the tension between the political state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus. The former represents a common conception of the ideological dominance of the state, while the second reflects a more complex and sophisticated understanding of gaining consent through a process of ideological hegemony constructed in civil society. For social work, this tension between political society and civil society is ever-present, and while it may hold allegiances to civil society, social work's corpus is located within the political construction of a welfare state. In neo-Gramscian debates about neoliberalism, civil society is a key context as the sphere in which hegemony is based, and is the ground on which a new and challenging counter hegemony can arise (Cox 1999). The significance of a neo-Gramscian analysis of

[4] The concept of interpellation, or 'hailing' is used by Louis Althusser (1972) to describe the way in which individuals recognise themselves as subjects through the processes of an ideology, and how, as a consequence, they become complicit in their own subjugation.

the state, and Gramsci's inclusion of civil society, is, in the context of this research, that it places social work within the complex contemporary civil society.

Perhaps one of Gramsci's most valuable contributions is his idea of cultural hegemony and the examination of the relationship between culture, power and capitalism (Jackson Lears, 1985). The cultural processes of power radiate from contemporary capitalism through its use of ideas. Neo-Gramscian analysis provides an understanding of the importance of language and symbols to the currency of capitalism as a way of constructing consent. His conception of ideology provides an account of the relationship between structure and lived experience that enables a form of cultural autonomy, while still being enmeshed within hegemony. Hall (2011) suggests that ideology works best in contradiction, when it is a process of connecting the nuances and divergences into one common story. Gramsci (1971) identifies the historical necessity of ideology to psychologically organise the thought and activity of the human population, and to create the 'reality' of existence and provide a conscious identity and meaning.

To see an ideology as dominant requires power external to the context of individuals' lived experience. Responding and resisting in this context usually requires the generation of forms of political attack against a defined enemy. This analysis sees power as the domination of one group by another, and as forced compliance with established objectives. Neo-Gramscian ideas on ideology depart significantly from this account, suggesting that ideology, rather than being enforced only through the institutional apparatus of the state, requires compliance and a degree of commitment by the population at large. Neo-Gramscian accounts of cultural hegemony provide a vivid description of the way in which ideological consent is manufactured, and how it might change and be different in an alternative set of historical, political and cultural circumstances. The notion of neoliberalism as a historical bloc suggests a much more dynamic process than might currently be imagined.

A specific problem of the dominant ideology thesis is its inability to smoothly reconcile the possibility of agency with the notion of domination, nor is it able to comfortably explain the manner of the consent of individuals to the cause of neoliberalism when it is not in their interests. For Gill (2003, p. 3), neo-Gramscian hegemony is 'inclusive and forward-looking', and 'seeks to incorporate subordinate interests'. Much of the analysis of neoliberalism has focused on it as a 'supremacist' strategy of domination. In the case of neoliberalism, neo-Gramscian ideas of hegemony

and historical blocs provide a way of understanding its seemingly enveloping nature. This reflects neo-Gramscian efforts to develop a historicist view that remains essentially materialist but without the limitations of a mechanistic structural account (Beiler & Morton 2004).

The neo-Gramscian account of neoliberalism varies from conventional interpretations, emphasising the way that hegemonic factors vary with different political, cultural and economic circumstances. In this vein, Gill (2003) argues that world orders are contested historical blocs, where both the maintenance and refiguring of position are in constant flux. This approach provides a different analysis of the configuring of world orders, and suggests opportunities of different ways to view neoliberalism. Hall (2011) points out that neoliberalism faces considerable challenges, for it appears to lack the ability to resonate with considerable sections of the population. This has been countered by neoliberalism's de-politicisation of political processes, which has sought to detach people from politics and resistance – what Hall (2011) describes as 'disaffected consent'. For Gill (2008), this is a politics of cynicism, which is disarming in its long-term implications. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, neoliberalism's challenge is the maintenance of its temporary ideological hegemony in what is a largely disaffected political context. The maintenance of this hegemony requires the commitment of civil society, and demands concessions, illusion, and cynical politics.

THE STATE FROM A NEO-GRAMSCIAN PERSPECTIVE

While traditional Marxist approaches to capitalist society focus on issues of class and capital, Gramsci offers the view that the principal crisis of capitalism is not economic but hegemonic (Carnoy 2014). This is not to suggest that Gramsci's approach fails to take account of the structural processes of capital accumulation, but rather that he constructs the processes of social relations and social change within a much more contested notion of the state. In Gramsci's analysis, the state forms the principal instrument for the securing of capital accumulation, which it does through both politics and civil society.

To understand capitalism and the possibility of change we must understand the state in its entirety. As Jessop (1990, p. 5) describes it, Gramsci analysed *lo stato integrale* ('the integral state' or the 'state in its inclusive sense') by exploring political society and civil society as a totality. From this viewpoint, the state is not only constituted as the instruments

of government, but also as the soft elements of social cohesion, which constitute and form the effectiveness of state power. Gramsci (1971) argues that the combination of the state institutions of power (bureaucracy, the police, and the judiciary), and the non-coercive elements of civil society (education, the church, political and social groups) provides the political processes for social cohesion.

Mayo (2015) argues that to understand Gramsci's concept of the state we need to vacate the notion of a society as a consensus formed within civil society through popular oppositional politics. For Gramsci (1971), civil society acts to reinforce the state as a 'powerful system of fortresses and earthworks' (Gramsci 1971, p. 238). His markedly different approach highlights the way in which civil society as part of the state acts to create ideological necessities and maintain the dominant hegemony. As Gramsci (1971, cited in Mayo 2015, p. 7) puts it: 'the State was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks' put in place to maintain social power and commitment from the subaltern classes.

According to Jessop (1990, p. 5), Gramsci identifies that it is only 'when the "consensus" underlying capitalist development begins to crumble that society can transform itself'. The totality of the institution of the state acts in a reciprocal manner to ensure the conditions for capital accumulation (Mayo 2015). For Gramsci (1971), civil society plays an important ideological role of influence creation, establishing the illusion of freedom through contained contestation and the pretence of independent choice-making. According to Hall (1996, p. 424), the advantage of civil society in Gramsci's account is that it 'contains spaces, often within the ideological institutions themselves, where these arrangements can be contested and renegotiated'. This provides both a more fluid interpretation of the state and an interpretation of hegemonic processes as contested and unresolved.

THE EVOLVING NEOLIBERAL STATE

While the market is depicted as the central element of neoliberal society, it is argued here that the state is both a crucial element for maintaining ideological dominance, but also exists as a site of contest. Jessop (2002) claims that it is naive to view the nation state as the single preserve of the dominant classes, uncontested by class and political formations. The state, in his view, is inherently uneven, and political contests are inevitable in the maintenance of social cohesion. The political state under capitalism carries the

responsibility for maintaining social cohesion in a context of class division, social concern, and disruption and challenge.

Under neoliberalism, the political state has become the servant of the new global ruling class, which has reformulated the political state as a parasitic appendage used as the site for the maintenance of global market dominance. Walby (2003) highlights how, contrary to popular opinion, the nation state has not been reduced by globalisation, but that its role has been significantly changed. The function of the state under neoliberalism is multi-faceted, providing both ideological and pragmatic functions. In Mayo's (1994, p. 29) view, one of the myths perpetuated by neoliberalism is that the market is the main force in society and that the nation state has been relegated to obscurity because of globalisation. He goes on to argue that the state has not dissipated under neoliberalism, but has merely changed form.

Clarke (2007) argues that the state under neoliberalism has sought to either erase or subjugate its social functions by withdrawing state-sponsored social protection, by creating differential notions of citizenship by means of market economisation, and by inserting market mechanisms for social policy. He goes on to describe how the neoliberal state acts to domesticate social relations through the individualisation of responsibility and the elevation of the family as the centre of community. According to Mayo (2011), the state lost its 'welfarist' function upon taking up the role of regulator and facilitator of market capitalism. The neoliberal state re-envisages social responsibility as individual responsibility, and responding to social need is reconfigured as a harsher residual punitivism.

The development of a globalised world economy is dependent upon nation states promoting neoliberal ideological aims and aligning populations to a shifting set of government rationalities centred on the ideas of business, financialisation, and the market. One of the markers of contemporary capitalism is the losing of control by nations states over 'increasingly unfettered capital flows with the extension of international trade and the integration of production processes across borders, forcing them to pursue investment friendly policies' **(**Thompson 2010, p. 132). In Mayo's (2011) terms, the neoliberal state works to harmonise agencies to function in syncopation with the nation state through new relationships focused on producing alignment and consistency. This is achieved through 'processes of governance rather than government, more accountable, more subject to surveillance and ultimately more rationalised' (Mayo 2011, p. 61).

Nation states, whether they like it or not, are linked into the promotion of capital accumulation for global capitalists, leading inevitably to changed conceptions of what the nation state is and of its internal relationships with citizens. For social work this has meant quite a different understanding of the state and of social work's role within it. The neoliberal state, for social work, has meant marked changes, as its historical imprimatur has been based on a democratic state that has a role in moderating capitalism and maintaining some form of social responsibility for citizens' wellbeing. For social work, this has meant that it must accommodate not only new state forms but also changed intentions for its role.

Where once one of the state's prime objectives was the amelioration of poverty and disadvantage, it has now become committed to the idea of the citizen as the self-actualising consumer, and its role has been redefined to ensure economic efficiency, accountability and scrutiny for the benefit of capitalism. For social work, the neoliberal state confounds its intrinsic understandings of the nature and causes of disadvantage, and requires it to accept the individual pathologising of social issues. The consequence of the neoliberal state is to make social work's historical interpretation untenable.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that a critical perspective provides an awareness of both the structural and cultural aspects of neoliberalism. The history of critical thought is an account of ideas, challenged and imbued with lived experience, with the aim of producing social action. The chapter has explored some of the ways in which social work has created a relationship with critical theory, particularly in Australia. This thesis takes the view that developing a critical approach to understanding neoliberalism and its impact is a productive path.

While several critical approaches have been identified, the research makes the case for a Gramscian analysis of the hegemonic nature of contemporary capitalism. In analysing neoliberal hegemony, the thesis argues that the tenets of Gramscian theory provide a useful way of exploring neoliberalism, not only as a day-to-day set of practices and ideas, but also in its impact on broader society. Gramscian concepts of hegemony and historical blocs have been explored in this chapter as a way of exposing how new state forms are a central element of neoliberalism. Neo-Gramscian ideas of the state give

a detailed account of the methods by which neoliberalism reconfigures the social relations within contemporary capitalism (Hall 2011). While neo-Gramscian ideas have taken root in many discipline areas, and have provided an analysis of the impact of contemporary capitalism, they have been much less prominent in social work analysis (Garrett 2008).

This chapter has shown the value of a neo-Gramscian analysis, and the way in which the neoliberal ideas of the state (including civil society, relations of production and the manufacture of world views) have had a marked effect upon society, and upon the activities and ideas of social work. This chapter has argued that a neo-Gramscian analysis of neoliberalism and its relation to social work offers a dextrous way of not only uncovering the impact of neoliberal hegemony, but also of building a body of evidence about the possibilities for response.

It is also argued that there is a synergy between a neo-Gramscian theoretical approach and the critical research methodology. Gramsci's (1971) theoretical approach not only provides a theoretical framework, but also encourages, according to Jubas (2010), a methodological approach which emphasises the tensions and contestations in developing knowledge, rather than just accentuating binaries between cultural, economic, and political arenas. Drawing on Gramscian ideas of dialectical processes, the next chapter examines the way in which a critical research methodology combines with Gramscian ideas in an analysis of neoliberalism's impact.

CHAPTER 5
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF NEOLIBERALISM ON SOCIAL WORK IN AUSTRALIA

Previous chapters have explored the context of the research and the critical debates about the nature of neoliberalism, and have reviewed the literature on the impact of neoliberalism on social work. This chapter will develop a methodology consistent with a critical analysis of the relationship between neoliberalism and social work, and outline the research design.

As discussed in Chapter 3, a critical approach reflects a commitment to analysing the social relations of power that underpin the lived experiences of 'people in context'. Critical research is comfortably non-didactic, and affords a broad range of inquiry methods. However, it reflects an affinity with qualitative methodologies which pursue and challenge the nature of oppression by uncovering the assumptions inherent in received ideas and practices. Harvey (1990) outlines how a critical approach involves a deeper exploration than simply recording and analysing experiences of groups and individuals. A critical research approach offers a fundamental mechanism to challenge the deeper structures and processes that bring about oppression. Considering the lived experiences of individuals in the context of the structural circumstances of disadvantage enables an analysis that combines theory and day-to-day experiences.

A critical research approach also offers the opportunity to develop a dialogue that facilitates learning, both for contributors and the researcher. Freire (1970, p. 63) viewed dialogue as the 'the encounter between people, mediated by the world, in order to name the world'. As a method, it creates the opportunity to question and challenge the assumed 'natural state' of things, and in so doing to uncover the tension and conflict inherent in situations.

In this study of the impact of neoliberal hegemony on social work, I have applied critical ethnographic methods that create an epistemological consistency with the study's critical theoretical premise. In this chapter, I will develop a critical methodology to challenge the 'common sense' conception of neoliberalism and its effects. This methodology recognises language as a critical path for both defining and limiting the constructed notion of reality that affords neoliberalism a 'common sense'. The value of a

critical ethnographic approach is its ability to develop complex and detailed accounts, and, in this case, to do so across the geographically disparate and functionally different impacts of neoliberalism. Claims of integrity within this research approach rely on a series of mechanisms for checking and legitimising the research design and data. At its core, this study seeks to emulate the critical path, described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as challenging the oppressive and discriminatory social processes and structures that shape people's lives.

Using a critical ethnographic methodology, this research analyses accounts of the lived experience of social work educators as well as academic literature exploring neoliberalism's hegemonic project and its impact in the Australian context. I also undertake a methodological consideration within the study of the design challenges and decision-making processes in the conduct of the research. The research design reflects an effort to develop methods of inquiry that are best able to produce coherent and sophisticated inductive data. Factors such as the choice of contributors, the demands of data collection, and the methods of analysis are considered in light of the nature of the topic and the research design.

Ethical concerns and decision-making processes are key elements of critical research. The subjective nature of the inquiry is elevated to consider how the research process influences its outcomes. In this study, these elements have been considered as part of both the research design's formulation and of the ethical processes for responsible protection of those involved in the research. The chapter concludes with a summary and outline of the research's methodological limitations and potentials.

DEFINING THE AREA OF RESEARCH

In defining the research project, I have drawn on academic literature highlighting the impact of neoliberalism on social work that exposes both the challenges to social work practice expectations and to social work's mission (as outlined in Chapter 3) (Gray Midgley & Webb 2011; Ferguson & Lavalette 2006; Baines 2006; Clarke 2004). While the literature depicts a range of themes around neoliberalism, its hegemonic resonance also reflects the difficulty in grappling with the mutability of the neoliberal political project (Ong 2006).

This research draws together these elements to focus on the contested nature of neoliberalism and the ways in which it is experienced by social work educators in Australia as a way of understanding both its nature and impact in the Australian context. Conventionally, neoliberalism has been defined in terms of its organisational impact, and of its use of the co-contingencies of the privatisation and marketisation of services. What has been less visible is the more complex socio-political project of neoliberalism. It is argued in this thesis that the narrowing of representations of the impact of neoliberalism's project has allowed aspects of it that change the very nature of citizenship and social relations to remain somewhat amorphous in the day-to-day workplace experiences of social workers (Garrett 2010; Baines 2006).

Beyond the organisational experiences of neoliberalism, broader ideological and practice concerns, evidenced in the literature, have also been significant areas of research. This research project explores the impact of neoliberalism, as a cultural hegemonic project, on social work. The study takes the view that such an analysis requires an understanding of neoliberalism's impact on the socio-political project of social work: its values, identity and mission; the redefining of social citizenship and the role of civil society and the state; and the processes by which its ideological penetration has been maintained.

It is observed that the socio-political impact of neoliberalism remains perhaps under-researched, particularly in the Australian context (Wallace & Pease 2011). This thesis focuses on a critical understanding of neoliberalism's impact on Australian social work, and on the context of neoliberal ideological positioning, arguing that aspects of neoliberalism's hegemonic ideology and counter-intuitive turns remain somewhat opaque, and that further research is needed to explore its implications for social work in Australia.

Studying neoliberalism is methodologically challenging in a number of ways. There has been considerable debate as to its legitimacy as a concept, and its history and intellectual development reflect a complex and diverse set of iterations, affected significantly by various cultural and political contexts. As a consequence, the process of formation and reformation of neoliberalism's ideological 'common sense' is a central theme of this research, as is the manner in which neoliberalism penetrates individuals' political and social lives (Ong 2006; Harvey 2005; Adamson 1980). The development and maintenance of its dominant hegemony requires the establishment of cultural

consent, but this central political process remains contested, forming and reforming and adjusting to threats. It is never complete or secured, and is constantly in crisis (Hay 1995; Gramsci 1971).

The research design developed for this study draws on these Gramscian notions of the contested nature of the processes of cultural hegemony, and uses their analysis as a way of examining how neoliberal ideology is formed and maintained through cultural processes of subjugation. While notions of ideology are often depicted as the simple dominance of a set of ideas through institutional processes, a cultural hegemonic approach affords the opportunity to view ideological processes in a more dynamic way (Gramsci 1971). For this study, I have developed a research approach drawing on neo-Gramscian cultural hegemonic ideas through relevant academic literature and the lived experiences of neoliberal hegemony of Australian social work educators. These two types of data have been used to develop dense accounts of the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism and its impact on social work in Australia.

I have sought a methodology that engages with the complex nature of neoliberalism; its overarching ideological nature, its often differential, fragmented elements, and its convoluted and disturbing impact on social work in Australia. The research is framed specifically to understand the nature of the impact of neoliberalism and to develop evidence of social work's responses to it, be they disruptive, resistant, or accommodative. While developed as themes within the research, these categories are considered to be overlapping and not mutually exclusive, and are used loosely to gather the responses of contributors rather than as positivist representations of actually existing phenomena. Within the study, the ideas and representations of neoliberalism and its 'common sense' are considered to be contested elements across a range of contexts.

The research aims are:

- To examine the nature and processes of neoliberalism as a hegemonic project in Australian social work education, and
- To analyse how Australian social work educators understand the possibilities for an emancipatory critical response to the impact of neoliberal hegemony on Australian social work.

The primary concern of this study is to advance an interpretation of neoliberalism's impact on social work as a hegemonic process, rather than to provide a

simple catalogue of neoliberalism's destructive tendencies. Using an ethnographic research method the study critically explores the complexity of neoliberal hegemony and its impact on social work in Australia. Taking a dialectical approach to the development of data, the study draws upon both the critical academic literature and contributor interviews to construct an inductive narrative.

The research methodology has taken a critical ethnographic approach to engage contributors in ways that have influenced the research design. By drawing on their questions, answers and ideas, the research design has been refined to reveal deep data. Using a critical reflective to approach contributors' ideas on the impact of neoliberalism, particularly with regard to social work in Australia, has enabled an ongoing reflection on both the process and structure of the research. This interactive research process, drawing on contributors' thoughts, ideas and critical comments, occurred during the research design and the interviews. Freire (1970) talks about this as a dialogical approach, where individuals are involved in a creative process of constructing the value and meaning in discursive events.

While I, as the researcher, have been responsible for the selection of the bulk of the critical literature used within this study, the interactive design method also gave me the opportunity to collect sources and ideas from contributors. The social work educators intertwined their lived experiences of neoliberalism with their academic understandings. This often occurred early on, during discussions and feedback on the briefing paper and in the research interviews themselves, where critical engagement and a critical questioning approach extended the dimensions of the interviews and drew in sources and ideas not already identified. The interviews were intended to gather data that was both complex and diverse, giving expression to contributors' understandings of neoliberalism's effects on social work.

The interviews canvassed personal experiences, and reflected secondary accounts and academic interpretations of ideas. This expanded the interaction between social work educators and the academic literature, giving rise to dense inductive critical data. The data emanated from a series of general introductory questions that were expanded upon by contributors as the interviews unfolded. The interview questions formed the basis for the development of further discussion and debate, and contributors' interests, ideas and academic knowledge were used to guide the interviews. Contributors were selected based on their interest in the research topic and their availability. The research questions were

deliberately kept broad to encourage contributors to contribute to the direction and content of each interview.

A NEO-GRAMSCIAN RESEARCH APPROACH

Contemporary critical theory provides the opportunity to explore the processes by which both individual agency and institutional structures contribute to oppression. Cultural accounts of oppression are not new, however, as Antonio Gramsci, in the 1930s, recognised the limitations of conventional Marxist analysis and elaborated on what he described as 'cultural hegemony', a process where ideological consent is manufactured within civil society (Gramsci 1971). Contemporary critical theorists offer a range of expressions of the ways in which culture enables capitalism in contemporary society (Hall 2011).

Gramsci (1971) not only conceptualises the way in which we might theoretically understand social relations and capitalism as a hegemonic ideology, but also provides an insight into the ways in which research methods and methodological processes reflect epistemological frameworks. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, knowledge is not concrete but multiple, subjective, and built upon relationships within contexts, and the methods of developing it are inexact process, reliant not a specific methodological approach but a flexible one (Hall 1991; Buttigieg 1992; Morton 1999). As Gramsci describes, developing scientific research on the basis of some standard method 'chosen because it has given good results in another field of research to which it was naturally suited, is a strange delusion which has little to do with science' (Gramsci 1971, pp. 438–439, cited in Jubas 2010, p. 233).

There are, however, some methods better suited to critical Gramscian inquiry; methods that advance flexibility and open-mindedness in the research process, and which recognise in:

> binary categories, such as materiality and culture, structure and discourse, the group and the individual in terms of the tension that unites them rather than the line that divides them (Jubas 2010, p. 223).

The focus of a neo-Gramscian approach to research is on the social context, and on bringing about social change within that context. Within a critical approach to research, a variety of qualitative methods of inquiry are often used: critical ethnography, case studies, historical analyses, and participant research, for example. Each provides, in

its own way, the opportunity to encourage dialectical and reflective techniques. A significant element of a neo-Gramscian analysis is a recognition of the false separation between the researcher and groups in society. This objectification of the researcher and the researched is rejected as a false binary built upon positivist assumptions of truth. Jubas (2010) reflects, in Gramscian terms, that the objective of research should be the development of stronger relations between researcher and respondents as a way to develop deeper knowledge.

The potential of social work as an emancipatory project within a neoliberal hegemony is an interesting but conflicted question. What a neo-Gramscian research approach offers is the possibility of a reappraisal of the space within civil society and of the role of social work. The critical tradition of neo-Gramscian scholarship affords a method of analytical inquiry that opens up the space between the lived experiences of individuals and the structures that frame their lives.

While the neo-Gramscian literature does not position itself within a particular research approach or methodology, the exploration of the key elements of a neo-Gramscian approach – ideological hegemony, historical blocs, and the political and civil roles of the state – form a mode of analysis that can be applied to the contemporary context of neoliberalism. The literature suggests that a critical research approach requires a methodology committed to emancipatory social change, and should reflect the complex inter-relations of culture, politics and lived experience in uncovering hegemonic processes. In a critical endeavour, the ability to uncover the tensions and contortions of hegemonic dominance makes for an understanding of the possibility for change and resistance. Giroux (1988) highlights this interplay of historical circumstance, contemporary ideological reality, and the material practices that reinforce and make sense of what he describes as ‘the logic of domination’.

These processes of ideology, and processes whereby citizens can appear to knowingly work against their own best interests in society, form a central theme of this study. This question of the way in which contemporary society both uses psychological processes of control and then implicates individuals in the process of its maintenance is reflected in many accounts of the ways in which capitalism has changed over time (see, for example, Garrett 2008). In one account, Hay (1995) draws on Althusser’s (1972) notion of interpellation, where individuals are pre-determined to fill positions and play roles. In this he describes a process in which individuals are both dominated and

subjugated to comply with ideological imperatives, acting to maintain and modify their own subjugation. The argument presented in this thesis is that, while this gives an account of the processes of domination and self-subjugation, these processes are less dexterous or complete than they might appear, and may be intersected, rejected, partially accepted, or go unrecognised by the human agency of the individual (Harris 2003; Hay 1995).

It became clear that developing an inductive, rather than deductive, research methodology provided an opportunity to uncover some of the complexities of neoliberalism's hegemonic impact. Drafting a critical research methodology ultimately requires developing a response to the processes of oppression. A neo-Gramscian approach to research not only examines the existence of oppression and its historical antecedents, but also provides an avenue for uncovering the ways in which oppression is fostered and maintained. What is elevated in a Gramscian account is the way in which the oppressed are co-opted into the processes of oppression. Using the Gramscian idea of cultural hegemony provides a vantage point for examining neoliberalism's mechanisms and processes, and their impact.

Two key factors emerge in debates about neoliberalism: the processes of formation of its hegemony; and its impact in terms of reconstructing 'the social', the way in which citizens are engaged within society. Both aspects are of interest in this study, particularly with regard to social work's positioning and identity in contemporary society. Moreover, this research affords an opportunity to understand something of the ways in which social work forms part of, and is resistant to, neoliberalism's cultural and ideological hegemony. Defining social work is not without its challenges, because it is formed as multiple projects and multiple practices across a broad range of locations and disciplinary co-operations. The study therefore recognises the breadth and diversity of the discipline of social work, and draws upon areas that are particularly illuminating in order to understand neoliberal hegemony. In this regard, the research has sought to understand social work in a number of ways; through its practices, as a professional project with a particular set of identities and ideals, and as a curricular project within educational institutions.

PURSUING A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Ethnography as a methodology has its roots in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology focused on understanding the direct experiences of cultures and marginalised populations. Geertz (1973) describes one of advantages of an ethnographic approach as its ability to develop dense descriptions that not only describe behaviour but contextualises it as well.

While ethnography is attractive to critical researchers for its efforts to escape the "theoretical cul-de-sac of over-determinism" (Anderson 1989, p. 251), it has shortcomings. Maddison, (2005, citing Fine, 1994) argues, that ethnography for the most part has made dubious claims of capturing real lived experiences reflected either through empiricist natural sciences or interpretist respondent accounts and masking its historical association with colonialist and imperialist studies of cultures (Jordan & Yeomans 1995; Said 1989).

Critical research, while non-prescriptive methodologically, encourages methods that expose oppression and disadvantage. As an approach, it is infused with the historical context of ideology, and with an endeavour to equitize relationships between parties involved in the research. Critical ethnographic accounts recognise and explore the structural and political context of lived experiences and the unequal power relations activated by dominant interests (Harvey 1990). Critical ethnography reappraises the relationship between theory research and social relations (Maddison 2005) and challenges the manner in which individuals and groups are permeated by oppressive processes and meanings within ideological hegemony (Anderson 1989).

Developing a critical epistemology requires the exploration of a number of relationships; between structures, power and ideas, and between power and claims of truthfulness (Carspecken 1996). Critical ethnography responds to these dualisms through reflectivity (Anderson 1989) in order to challenge the researcher's assumptions and methods and the positioning of the researcher and contributors (Jordan & Yeomans 1995).

Drawing on Harvey's (1990) approach to critical research, this study uses semi-structured, conversational interviews with social work educators and a critical engagement with the literature to develop accounts of the impact of neoliberalism on social work. This reflective, conversational approach to interviews is designed to

challenge assumptions, and to draw out the tensions within the topic based on experiences and self-investigation (Rahman 2008). The study draws upon reflexive processes to challenge the ideological positioning of both researcher and contributors, and to mediate the inherent power and positioning of the researcher. The aim is to modify the methodological approach on the basis of reflective observations, and to develop a process for the authentication of the data (Jordan & Yeomans 1995; Carspecken 1996; Maddison 2005).

Critical participatory research requires a broad and engaging orientation centred on the growth of knowledge, and an inquisitive approach to problems rather than a simple quantification of phenomena (Chevalier & Buckles 2013). Within the critical research process, individuals take an active part in the direction and development of the research, rather than simply being sources of data. One of the aspects that makes critical qualitative research different from traditional quantitative methods is the role of the researcher as a facilitator of the dialectical construction of knowledge, rather than simply seeking to capture experiences. Freire (1970) says that critical research processes can be transformative in a number of ways, as a way of developing new knowledge, and also for their inherent epistemological value.

The breadth and complexity of neoliberalism make it a difficult subject. Its considerable contested nature, its profound impact, and the disquiet it has created within social work make it difficult to digest and to develop a methodology and methods that produce more than just generalised accounts. In much research design, the sources of data are indicated by the nature of the inquiry and the research question. Often, where a particular population or group is the central point of inquiry, research participants fall to hand as part of the research questions. In this inquiry, however, this was not the case, firstly because this research has sought to understand the broad impact across the discipline of social work, rather than within a particular sub-group or location. Secondly, and perhaps more critically, gathering meaningful data that is able to illuminate such a broad and complex topic from any individual group that is able to reflect both the historical and theoretical considerations of neoliberalism, as well as to reflect upon their lived experiences, is a daunting prospect.

The development of data sources is naturally considered a primary issue in the research design. In this study, several approaches were considered at an early stage. Initially, the design focused on the potential for social work practitioners to act as a

primary source of data, based on their direct involvement in the day-to-day processes of neoliberalism, and their closeness to its impacts on social work through their experiences within professional roles and practices. There are several studies that show the value of practitioner experiences in understanding the impact of neoliberalism on social work (Finlay & McCormick 2005; Baines 2006). Baines (2006) suggests, however, that social workers are less aware of the broader political and historical understanding of neoliberalism's ideological 'common sense'.

Mindful of Parton's (1994) assertion that social work lacks a sufficient theoretical basis, and what Healy and Meagher (2004) describe as social workers' insufficient training and support to enact social work as a thoughtful and analytic process, the research project sought contributors who could mitigate some of these concerns. In the study, this was considered to have a particular pertinence, as it was considered that many aspects of neoliberalism present a distinct intellectual challenge. Developing the study aimed at elevating the socio-political nature of neoliberalism, and seeking to include broader political and historical elements of it, highlighted the need for contributors who had experience of historical, theoretical, and practical aspects of neoliberalism.

One possible source of contributors to the study were academics from a wide range of disciplines, including social work, to fulfil the need for broad, textured accounts that could contribute significantly to the academic debate. Such sources, it was felt, would inject views from other disciplinary spaces, different theoretical constructs, and historical trajectories into the discussion about the impact of neoliberal hegemony. The opportunity of drawing on broader disciplinary knowledge was thought to increase the depth and complexity the data. However, it was considered that such an approach might render the study too much a comparison between disciplines. It was also considered that the sheer breadth of disciplinary knowledge and approaches would be too difficult to accommodate in such a limited study, and that a focus on disciplinary approaches would dilute an analysis specific to the impact of neoliberalism on Australian social work.

I recognised that to pursue a broad-ranging study of the implications of neoliberalism for social work would require contributors with a breadth of understanding of the topic, an awareness of the broader ideological aspects of neoliberalism, and personal experience of its impact. I considered this constellation of traits to be critical to the study having access to rich data.

The study sought to combine the knowledge and experiences of contributors with academic literary sources on neoliberalism and its impact. The objective of this approach was to infuse the study with multiple data sources, and this required a methodology where the voices of individuals remained prominent, and which engaged with theoretical and research accounts, rather than being subsumed as an underlay of theoretical propositions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations form an essential part of the research methodology of this study on a number of levels. Firstly, as a contributory participatory research study, it was imperative that contributors have a mutually agreed understanding of the research's goals, that their rights as contributors were individually and collectively recognised, and that their contributions were open for discussion throughout the project. This was established in the project outline, in which contributors were given a copy of a briefing paper that included the research objectives. Other documents provided at this early stage included a plain language research statement, the general questions for discussion, and the research consent forms developed for the project. Contributors were also asked to consider potential risks, both to themselves and to other contributors to the research. Additionally, although this research commenced as a Master of Social Work dissertation, it was converted into a PhD after I had begun the initial research.

Several fundamental practical ethical considerations were explored and defined with contributors as part of the project. Contributors' anonymity, both personally and professionally, was a key consideration, as was the relation of this study to the institutions by which the contributors are employed. As a consequence, individuals were not responding on behalf of their specific institution, and neither their academic writing nor the academic institution at which they work was mentioned.

An ethical framework was devised to develop and maintain awareness of the manner in which the research may impinge, personally or professionally, on contributors, and also to define the relationship between the contributors and their employing institutions. The issue of anonymity applied particularly to those with a considerable profile and known position, matters which were raised and considered as part of the study. It should be noted, however, that because the contributors are identified as

Professors or Course Coordinators, they cannot be completely anonymous. Every effort was made, however, to maintain anonymity through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information which arose in the interviews.

As a critical research project, the focus was on the context of the issues rather than on individuals (Merriam 1998), and analysis and presentation of research findings would be done in such a way as to draw out themes and not to identify particular contributors in any detail. The researcher and contributors were aware that although every effort was made to ensure anonymity, it was possible that individuals may still be identified by their positions or characteristic use of language. A secondary consideration was maintaining a focus on the research subject matter, rather than on individual contributors.

More generally, the research was planned and conducted in line with Deakin University Human Research Ethics, where it has met NEAF ethics approval (HEAG-H 15_2011, see Appendix 1), which required full disclosure of the research project, its aims and potential effects.

Each of the potential contributors was invited by letter to participate in the study (Appendix 4), and was given a plain language statement outlining the project, its intentions and limitations, and a disclosure of the potential nature of their involvement (Appendix 2). A consent form outlining the voluntary nature of their participation and their ability to withdraw at any time was also forwarded to all potential contributors (Appendix 3). While there was considered to be a low probability of harm to individuals participating in the research, contributors were made aware of the political sensitivity of the issue under examination. Additionally, contributors were provided with a briefing paper about the project (Appendix 5).

It was noted that contributors might well appear as both interviewees and authors of cited literature. In the context of this research, there was no effort to connect interviewees with their published works, nor has there been an effort to try to establish contributors' ideological positions regarding the literature.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA GENERATION

As outlined previously, this study used multiple sources of data. It draws on the academic literature, including research studies on neoliberalism and its impact, and involved a number of semi-structured interviews with social work educators.

The literature was used in a dialectical manner to engage with the ideas and experiences of social work educators, and as a vehicle of reflectivity on the nature of the contributions and themes of analysis. To achieve greater depth of knowledge of neoliberalism's impact, contributors were also asked to suggest literature, the inclusion of which helped in their explanation of ideas and contributed to a more complex narrative.

While interviews are a common source of data in qualitative research studies, in critical research the interview is used as an entry point into the assumptions and conflicts of social relations (Campbell 1998, cited in Walby 2005, p. 164). A key aspect of critical interviewing in this study was the development of the researcher–contributor relationship. This afforded the chance to produce co-constructed data of sufficient depth and focus for the study.

A qualitative ethnographic interview technique was chosen, as this was seen to have the best chance of developing reflexivity, equating power with dialogical data. In short, semi-structured interviews were used to provide the opportunity to develop in-depth data in a dialectical process. This contextual and situational positioning of the data through reflexive discussion was designed allow contributors to alter the nature and direction of the questioning, resulting in a dialogical research fabric.

SOCIAL WORK EDUCATORS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY

One of the key factors in the selection of contributors for this research has been the need to develop sophisticated data on a complex topic, one which is often confusing and sometimes concealed. Exploring the impact of neoliberalism on social work requires more than a simple listing of impacts felt in workplaces, because its effects are not only mechanical but also ideological, and, to some degree, subliminal. This notion of exploring how neoliberalism has inhabited not only the space of social welfare but has sought to reconstruct its identity and purpose suggests a complexity of data covering a range of aspects of neoliberalism's reach. In this context, social work educators from

Australian universities are considered well placed, at a crossroads of major aspects of social work, to respond to the complex and vexing nature of neoliberalism and its impact.

In the final analysis, several factors were considered vital in developing the data for the research:

- To uncover the broad engagement of neoliberalism with social work,
- To analyse the historical and intellectual interplay between neoliberal hegemony and social work, and
- To examine how social work has responded to neoliberalism's mutative forms.

The conclusion of these considerations gravitated toward choosing a design that intertwined the contributions of social work educators with the academic social work literature on neoliberalism and social work.

Social work educators were considered to be able to provide insider accounts that offered a historical perspective, intellectual understanding, lived experiences, and contextual variety. While it was understood that educators were not in the same position as practitioners working in social services organisations, their accounts, and the breadth of their academic knowledge and understanding, were thought to provide significant depth and a diverse range of understandings to the study. It was considered that the interaction with the academic literature would form a way of intensifying the dialogue on the impact of neoliberalism, its nuances, and its ongoing contentions. for the purposes of this study, social work educators were defined as professors of social work, course leaders or course coordinators from schools of social work in universities on the east coast of mainland Australia. The study has sought to engage a significant number of contributors, and, as a qualitative study, it does not seek generalisability.

In striking a balance between the scope of the project, the resources available, and the viability of finding a reasonable cohort of contributors, it was decided to limit the study to east coast universities in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. This was considered to be both logistically and financially viable for the researcher, and to provide the opportunity to gain contributions from a substantial number of Australian university social work educators. The social work educators were drawn from the list maintained by

the Accredited School of Social Work from the AASW, and letters of invitation were then sent to professors and course co-ordinators, seeking their involvement.

Professors and course coordinators were also given the opportunity to invite other educators to participate in the interviews. This was not only a recognition of the time constraints and commitments of professors and course co-ordinators, but an acknowledgement that others who had not been contacted directly may be personally and academically situated to contribute to the project.

THE CONTRIBUTOR INTERVIEWS

In all, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with social work educators, either professors of social work or course leaders or co-ordinators from schools of social work[5] in universities on the eastern coast of mainland Australia. Contributors were given the opportunity to include others in the interviews, suggest other interviewees, or have another social work educator take their place. All contributors were advised of the ethical standards of the project, and were offered the opportunity to make contact with either me or the research project's primary supervisor. The majority of individuals asked to contribute to the project were eager to be involved, and discussions centred on providing ample time without distraction, and at a location most suitable to them. None of the contributors objected to being audio recorded.

Using Harvey's (1990) approach of democratising the research in terms of interview processes and methods of analysis, questions were given to respondents in advance and were used only as a starting point for the interviews. All contributors were amenable to this format for the research. The interviews were conducted in a conversational and discursive manner, and the initial set of questions led to broad-ranging discussions, providing highly diverse and dense data.

As interviewer, I was required to adapt to, and reflect on, the questions, the direction of the interviews, and the intellectual processing of the interviews, to highlight key aspects of critical ethnographic methods (Thomas 1993). Contributors were interviewed during the second half of 2011 and the first half of 2012, with additional

[5] Social work schools were defined by accreditation with the AASW.

interviews occurring between October 2012 and May 2015. Interviews were conducted in a manner that best suited the contributor, who chose the time, location and direction of the interview, and who were encouraged to use the initial questions as a starting point for their own observations, critiques and analysis.

The questions were framed in terms of how neoliberalism had affected social work in Australia, and the extent to which the contributors felt that social work had become a part of the neoliberal project. The questions went on to explore issues of response and challenge to neoliberalism, particularly how contributors' social work program had responded to neoliberalism, and what they saw as the possibilities for challenge and resistance by social work in Australia.

Thirteen of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, most either in the educator's workplace or at a café or other location chosen by them. Of the remaining two, one was by phone and the other by Skype. Transcripts were produced from the audio recordings and read for detailed content and to develop an overview of the interview.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggest that it is desirable that interview and analysis should occur as close to one another as possible. To this end, I performed some initial thematic analysis immediately after the interviews were transcribed. Analysis, in their view, should not be seen as essentially separate, and the themes that surface early in critical ethnographic research can become an important part of the on-going interview process.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Data analysis plays a pivotal role in digesting and developing significant amounts of information, both in a usable format, but also in a way that is consistent with the objectives of the research (Merriam 2002). Several epistemological questions arose in the development of the methods of data analysis. Firstly, as O'Reilly (2012) points out, while analysis in research is typically viewed as a discrete stage, in ethnographic research it is a more tangled and continuous process. This leads to a continuous backwards and forwards analysis. Secondly, while it is common to construct codes, patterns and categories as part of analysis, this also requires deftness to avoid becoming overwrought with category- and pattern-making power at the expense of reflective and subtly emergent themes.

In response to these issues, I have drawn upon Harvey's (1990) method of critical ethnographic data analysis. Harvey (1990) suggests using multiple readings of the data to develop themes. The first stage is a linear reading to become familiar with the data and to spot themes. These are then compiled and reflected through multiple readings, and guided by the reappearance of ideas. The kinds of social relations evident in the data are identified and recorded at this time.

The second stage of analysis requires horizontal reading of the themes for cohesiveness and interrelations. These processes define what Harvey (1990) describes as 'ideological mediations' and 'anomalies', which provide scope for examining the connections between social structure and respondents' accounts. Again, themes are reconstructed on the basis of this re-examination. The initial research questions and subsequent question development through conversations with contributors provided the guidelines for both analysis and theme development.

The question of the authenticity of qualitative data is often raised in discussions of research methodology, and while developing the credibility of data is important, attempts to replicate positivist methodologies often result in a kind of faux authenticity. What is important in this study is to develop data that is ethically gathered, and which has been authenticated through reflection and 'member checking'. In this study, efforts have been made to engage with contributors in both the design of the research and the methods of analysis. Contributors have been involved in the development of research themes, and in critically challenging the researcher's assumptions. The research, from the outset, has sought to develop data and themes dialogically with contributors.

The interview data in this study was audio recorded for practical purposes, with the interviews generally lasting between one and two hours. All interviews were transcribed verbatim to avoid 'tidying up' of the responses in order to avoid unintended inscription of meanings. Ambiguities and anomalies were separately recorded and member-checked, and the researcher was aware of seeking to maintain the nuances of interviewees as part of the transcription process. Interviews, while analysed from transcriptions, were also listened to in their entirety to gain a holistic view of the recorded data.

While a relatively small number of interviews were conducted (15), the researcher considers the depth and diversity of responses to provide a sophisticated body

of data, and one in line with the intentions of the research. The researcher recognises the limited size of the study, but believes that its nature, the method of data development, and the manner of analysis still provide a valuable approach to this topic.

The study was not designed to produce either a descriptive or quantifiable account of the impact of neoliberalism, nor does it make generalisations about the impact of neoliberalism on social work, but it does, in the critical research tradition, contribute to the development of knowledge on neoliberalism and its implications for social work. While the study was conducted using a small number of contributors, attention was paid to ensuring a broad sample of respondents from across eastern Australia who contributed a diversity of interpretations and understandings of the topic. This has contributed to the depth of understanding of the impact of neoliberalism on social work.

Critical research seeks to analyse power relations in a number of ways, formatively through the themes drawn from the interviews, but also by analysing the ways in which language and communication contribute to domination in capitalist society. Both Hay's (1995) analysis of interpellation and Gramsci's (1971) conception of cultural hegemony highlight the central role of communication in the domination of individuals.

The second form of data was academic literature on neoliberalism and social work. This included writing on neoliberalism and its impact on social work both in Australia and in an international context over approximately the past 15 years. This timescale, while not exclusive, reflects the greater prominence of neoliberalism in the academic literature in the first years of the 21st Century. The selection of academic literature followed a multi-axial path, exploring general critical literature about neoliberalism, its nature and interpretation, literature related to social work and neoliberalism both internationally and within the Australian context, and critical literature on the impact of neoliberalism across contexts and disciplines.

A process of critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to explore the literature and both to draw from it the issues, themes and context of the debates and research on neoliberalism, and to uncover the ways in which language forms and reforms sets of structural relations of authorship, authority, audience and objectives within a context of power (McGregor 2003). This is a particularly potent form of analysis in this context, because it obviates access to the everyday contexts by which power and knowledge are

built for regulation and normalisation. It provides a way to intersect the manner in which the processes of hegemony have been established (McGregor 2003). Critical discourse analysis also provides a vehicle for resistance and critique through its ways of achieving praxis of theory and method (Fairclough 2002).

This study draws on Fairclough's (2003) notes on several aspects of the CDA process: the way in which social problems are influenced by neoliberal ideology/discourse; the nature of the obstacles created by neoliberalism and the consequent political processes of resistance and emancipation; and reflexivity on the analysis. In this study, these are used to provide specific insight into the power of language in the context of neoliberalism and resistance, and into hidden meanings that hold sway in everyday life. While there are computerised means of thematic analysis of literature available, in this project the themes were developed manually, as this was perhaps the best way of maintaining the nuances of the interviews – recognising, though, that only the smallness of this project made that approach realistic.

Fairclough (2003) suggests that analysis commence as soon as is practicable, rather than upon the completion of all the interviews, as part of a reflexive process of theme development. Initial themes discerned in this study's interviews included the conception of neoliberalism as an ideology, divergent notions of social work, neoliberalism's dominance in organisational relations, and the changing nature of academic institutions. Reflexivity was used to ensure that that these early themes did not overshadow the appearance of new themes as the interviews progressed.

THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study provides a valuable example of the way in which a critical ethnographic research methodology might be applied in combination with neo-Gramscian ideas. Seeing neoliberalism as not categorically definable, but as in some ways obtuse and variable, invites a critical method within which knowledge is inductive rather than deductive. This project, I believe, encourages the exploration of neoliberal hegemony in a way that both expands understanding of its nature and reach, and provides social work with opportunities to understand and contend with its impact. Such an analysis affords, I argue, a perspective relevant to the social work project.

The study provides several further possibilities for social work and the ways in which it might examine contemporary social relations. This thesis represents an effort to raise awareness of the possibilities that can be brought to bear, both philosophically and methodologically, on social work's further exploration of neo-Gramscian ideas and processes. As noted earlier, while Gramsci's theories have currency in fields as wide apart as education, healthcare and international relations, there is a limited literature associated with social work, particularly in the Australian context. The application of Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony resonates across a wide range of disciplines and professions that face similar issues and concerns about neoliberalism. An energising of Gramscian ideas in social work, I argue, would provide a constructive avenue for a broader analysis of the impact of neoliberalism, and would also provide impetus to consider the circumstances of social work within late capitalism.

One of the major challenges for this study is the scale and complexity of the topic relative to the resources available. As considered earlier, the issue for small scale studies approaching broad, ill-defined and complex topics is that they are often deterred for fear of producing findings that are considered superficial or without valuable meaning, or that lose their specific contextual meaning.

This study articulates the tension between critical research design and the development of data within such a complex topic. Significant thought was given to the idea of limiting the size of the study by focusing on a specific context of neoliberalism, or by only exploring its day-to-day impact on social workers. In the final analysis, it was considered desirable to maintain the broad, overarching focus on neoliberalism so that complex social relations could be adequately explored. What was deemed to be crucial in this methodological design was the development of deep, sophisticated and divergent data, co-constructed with articulate and well-informed contributors. While I recognise this breadth as an issue, this thesis presents the view that understanding the circumstances of social work in the contemporary context is aided by such a broad analysis.

The study recognises the critical tension between lived experience and broader ideological configurations, and while social work educators are well positioned at a crossroads of the social work project, their ability to provide detailed accounts of the day-to-day experiences of social workers under neoliberal ideology is more limited.

CONCLUSION

This critical ethnographic study is a testament to the value of the researcher sharing the process by conducting collaborative research. Critical research is knowledge constructing rather than simply categorising. As discussed in this chapter, the effort in critical research is to further understanding in order to bring about social change, and to do so in a manner that achieves a synergy between philosophical approach and methodology. This chapter acts as a methodological bridge between the previous, theoretical chapters and the data and analysis chapters which follow, serving to verify the research methodology and its link to theory and the aims of the research. As part of the critical methodology, I have sought to add personal and reflective elements to the research process.

One of the main objectives of this chapter was to assist the reader to understand the philosophical and ontological reasoning, and the way methodological choices have defined and advanced the research process. Key to this has been the research relationships developed between contributors and researcher; the openness of contributors' communication and ideas has been important to the direction of the research design.

Critical ethnography is characterised by the way in which it draws on multiple methods to develop sophisticated, contradiction-laden accounts of lived experiences. The account presented in this study is a compilation of extracts from three sources: my research journal, discussions with contributors about the research process, and data gathered during the research and through individual interviews. The use of the interviews has been a reflective process of seeking to identify themes related to the topic and to maintain the overall integrity and intentions of the contributors' accounts. Contributors' words have been italicised in the following chapters to immediately distinguish them, both from my own narrative, and also to reflect their significance.

In this chapter, I have explored the general methodological approach to the research, and have sought to justify taking a critical ethnographic approach. It is arguable that the methodological benefits of critical ethnography are reflected in its ability to link structural social relations to lived experiences across a range of contexts of social work to produce sophisticated data. Given the density and complexity of the topic, and the limited nature of the inquiry, it can only be seen as a piece of indicative research. While this is in some ways a limitation, I argue that it is an inevitable consequence of drawing together

such a wide range of elements to gather a greater understanding of the impact of neoliberalism on social work.

This chapter has given an account of the application of the methodological approach, including details of decisions about sources of data, the interview method, selection of contributors, and methods of analysis. The chapter ended with an outline of the limitations and potentials of the methodology.

While this chapter has outlined the application of critical ethnography in this thesis, something must be said about the relationship between the contributors and the research in developing themes. Ethnographically, a common method of theme development involves the insight of the researcher in examining the ‘complete sense’ of contributor interviews, seeking out what they intended within their narrative or through a closed feedback loop from contributors created to garner themes from (Fairclough 2003). The general research questions have been employed to elicit detailed accounts and essential aspects on neoliberalism and its impact from contributors.

The study’s themes, drawn from the insights of contributors and from the literature, have been developed by reading and re-reading the interviews, to identify both analytical and more complex aspects of the narrative, as well as by considering the literature, including previous studies. The result has been to give structure to the ideas developed within the interviews, and to gauge intent and expression. The research methodology in this study has sought to develop a coherent framework, utilising the understandings of contributors and the academic literature in a manner that seeks to create complex data to address the primary research questions. The construction of the data represents an ethnographic way of valuing the different contributions in a manner that builds a deeper and more complex narrative.

CHAPTER 6
THE HAILING OF SOCIAL WORK AND THE MANUFACTURE OF CONSENT

This chapter explores the ways in which consent to neoliberalism is manufactured and maintained, and the ways in which it has sought to 'hail' social work to the neoliberal project. The chapter uncovers some of the fundamental challenges to social work's underlying values, its practice, and its educational project that have been a consequence of the process of neoliberal 'hailing'. The hailing of social work involves a tension between neoliberal mechanisms that constrict, co-opt and discredit its knowledge and beliefs while also providing it with a degree of legitimacy and benefit.

Neoliberal structures and practices operate not only to interpellate social work, this study describes, into neoliberal notions of knowledge and practice, but also to alter the relationships of social work with citizens, and with the state and civil society. The context of the welfare state and social policy processes, it is argued, are formative elements in neoliberal hegemonic processes of conscripting Australian social work to a new construction of the 'social'. This chapter identifies the importance of understanding the context and processes of neoliberal hegemony as a precursor to considering Australian social work prospects.

THE PROCESSES OF NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

What makes neoliberal hegemony remarkable is its ability to construct, through the political, intellectual and moral processes of society, a willing consent within the population against their own best interests. Garrett (2012) argues that a series of 'moral justifications' that bind people to capitalism must be strong enough to overcome contradictory personal experiences and to become accepted as 'common sense'. These moral justifications, Cox (1981) suggests, require more than simple material notions of domination, but must include imagery, norms, language and social relations, and a set of institutions to both administer and maintain this semblance of a common sense.

Understanding the way in which consent is manufactured under neoliberalism's hegemony, Burawoy (1979) argues, is central to coming to terms with capitalism's shift from an industrial to a monopolistic form that requires 'persuasion and coercion' to maintain it.

Where once consensus within industrial society was based on negotiation between key collective groups, under monopoly global capitalism, the individual citizen has become prominent both as the centre of relations, and as the responsible agent across the institutions and processes of civil society (Burrawoy 1979).

Hegemony, according to Gramsci, is only gained through a constant battle of forces that ultimately convinces the population to act against their best interests. For Bourdieu (1999), neoliberalism's hegemony contains a vulnerability, as it rests on its presentation of a self-evident 'no alternative' situation. As Jessop (2003) describes it, neoliberal cultural hegemony, under monopoly capitalism, secures the consent of the population through a collective will, constructed through the opportunities and mobilisations of the ruling class. The institutions of civil society are used to coerce, condone, and discipline this 'willing' consent. These essentially private organisations of everyday life form the centre of hegemonic processes for value formation, challenge, and contestation.

This section will explore the way in which consent to the neoliberal hegemony has been pursued across social work ideas, values, practices and industrial processes, across the relations of production, civil society and the state, and in the realm of broader global ideas. It involves social work not only as a socio-political project, but also as a knowledge and practices endeavour.

This internationalisation of capitalism Burrawoy (1979) describes as increasingly tied to an ideological 'common sense' of world orders, affecting ideas, resources, and international institutions. This 'common sense', according to Woodiwiss (2005), is dynamic and reproductive, and its successful 'hailing' of individuals results from their unknowing subjugation to the ideas and interests of the dominant ideology. Therborn (1980) argues that, where individuals are interpellated to a dominant ideology, there is a necessity for both subjection and qualification. Individuals are not just hailed to the hegemony, but are also qualified in terms of their insertion into social relations. Individual subjectivity is an active subjugation, produced and reproduced in people's daily practices in which the state is the organiser and mediator of their subjugation.

The potential for challenge to any hegemonic regime, in Gramsci's terms, comes from the internal contradictions within hegemonic processes that tend to make them unstable.

The hegemonic process of domination, what Gramsci describes as a 'historical bloc',[6] is constructed within a particular set of historical circumstances. Jessop (2003) identifies a range of contradictions and challenges that inevitably occur within hegemonic processes, where new hegemonic forms are contradicted and challenged by historical contexts, and by political and social processes. Individuals have multiple subjectivities within an historical bloc, which at times may contradict each other and lead to conflicts over qualification, affirmation, and the sanctioning that is applied within a historical bloc. People, in this way, are interpellated into many different relations, set within a multiplicity of subjectivities. These often run counter to one another, within the process of social reproduction, and change in the struggle to maintain a consensus (Therborn 1980).

Individuals contribute to the process of hegemony both in forming and maintaining its dominance, but also act as counter-subjects at the same time. The interpellation or hailing of individuals to the dominant hegemony is never complete, and is rife with counter-hegemonic influences. These contradictory and diffuse elements make capitalist hegemony unstable and full of contradictions. The rapid rate of change of subjectivities within contemporary capitalism, and the conflicted circumstance of people's ability to understand, take up and countenance new subjectivities, presents a particular challenge for neoliberal hegemony and its effort to maintain cohesion and ensure consent (Cox 1987).

Althusser's (1971) conception of hailing or interpellation depicts ideology as the process by which individuals are drawn into being subjects through their recruitment and transformation through ideological processes to act in the interests of capital. The interpellation of individuals into subjects, in Althusser's (1971) description, has negated the possibility of meaningful resistance. The processes of subjugation are, however, never complete, and, according to Therborn (1980), individuals can be both subjects to the hegemonic ideology, but also counter-subjects who form part of a process of rejuvenation. This rejuvenation, while essential to capitalist accumulation, is nevertheless ultimately not controlled or effectively constrained.

[6] For a detailed examination of the Gramscian notion of historical blocs, see Cox (1997).

SOCIAL WORK, THE SOCIAL POLICY CONTEXT AND THE AUSTRALIAN WELFARE STATE

Neoliberal advancement is contingent upon context, according to Ong (2006), and while it contains common elements across locations, it is its abilities to diverge and mutate that have contributed to its survival (Peck & Tickell 2002). Having an understanding of the Australian social work context requires an examination of the Australian welfare state and of social work's changing position within it. For social work in Australia, the Australian welfare state and its social policy manifestations have historically formed the location of its activity, and have provided its sense and meaning. The neoliberal redefinition of citizenship and social circumstance has significant ramifications for the Australian post-war welfare state, and for Australian social work's position, identity, and working roles.

While the post-war Australian welfare state parallels its European counterparts in some aspects, there are also marked differences. Esping-Andersen (1996), in his typology of welfare states, describes the Australian welfare state in liberal terms, arguing that, unlike European social democratic regimes that sought to promote universalist social provision in the pursuit of social and economic equality, Australia has pursued modest, means-tested and strictly controlled levels of assistance, aimed at providing a stop-gap in support of the economic market. Its commitment to a 'wage-earners' welfare state' underlined an approach that viewed inequality as transitional within the broader labour market, and believed that encouraging personal responsibility and private solutions to social problems through the subsidising of private activity in social welfare led to economic growth and stability (Castles 1985).

According to Kelly (1994), Australian public policy since Federation in 1901 has been built upon several key pillars. What he describes as the 'Australian Settlement', was formed around a compromised set of policy prescriptions, the essential elements of which were providing tariff protection for manufacturers and an arbitrated living wage for workers. It detailed, in general terms, a 'white Australia policy' (an Anglo-centric immigration policy, with ethno-centric internal policy prescriptions), industry protection by tariffs, wage arbitration through a centralised industrial arbitration system, a state paternalism that gave citizens social protections and the state the right to intervene on the basis of the collective good of the country, set within a form of imperial benevolence.

While conservative political processes during the 1970s escalated the projection of market economics, the profession of social work in Australia was engaged in debates about social work's approach and position within Australian society, and how best for it to achieve social change. During this period, social work in Australia separated activist and industrial approaches from an elite construction of the profession by the formation of the Australian Social Welfare Union (ASWU) (Mendes 2003).[7] This separation led to a professional association forming around the principles and practices of professional identity, and as a defined area of skills and expertise (Mendes 2003).

The social, political and economic upheaval of World War II, and the rapid industrialisation of many western (and westernised) nation states, cemented notions of an interventionist welfare state centred on the provision of a means-tested system of unemployment benefits, which limited social welfare (Castles 1985). While limited in its provision, the Australian version of the welfare state expanded as part of a post-war industrial model. Australian social work has evolved within this broader socio-political context, as Jane, a contributor to the study, suggests:

> *When you study Australia as a welfare state, for me it has always been a targeted welfare system, it has never been different and in fact if you […] do a comparative policy analysis of all this sort of western-type [welfare states], Australia has always had the most targeted welfare policy.*

The Australian welfare state's liberalist conception and underpinning values are highlighted by its mixed model of public and private services, its focus on fiscal transfers, and its residualist approach to service provision. In the context of this post-war model of Australian welfare, neoliberalism has sought to demonise the system as a response to human need, and to portray its social policy responses as either ineffectual or counter-productive. It has sought to imply that it as an approach laden with self-interest, intent on developing elite careers of the professional class.

[7] The Australian Social Welfare Union (as part of the Australian Municipal Transport, Energy, Water, Ports, Community & Information Services Union), was founded in 1976, and amalgamated into the Australian Services Union in 1992.

SOCIAL WORK AND A POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

By the 1970s, according to Alston (2014, p. 43), support for the Australian welfare state had begun to fray, becoming increasingly re-configured as a 'highly targeted, market-based, residualist regime with punitive eligibility requirements and a redefinition of end users as "clients"'. This policy approach was not limited to the social welfare system, and was endemic to such things as the centralised wage fixing system, taxation, and the role of government. According to Connell, Fawcett and Meagher (2009, p. 322), the individualisation of employment contracts and the increased market flexibility of labour, 'produced a growing workforce of part-time and casual and contract labour' at the bottom of organisations.

Many western-style democracies faced similar changes, but, according to Connell et al. (2009, p. 321), within the Australian policy context, neoliberal ideas 'had astonishing success in creating markets for things whose commodification was once almost unimaginable: water, body parts, pollution and social welfare among them'. Through the mechanisms of marketisation, individualisation and privatisation, successive Australian governments have been able to develop a policy landscape impregnated with neoliberal policy processes (Connell et al. 2009). This restructuring of the workforce reduced the industrial power of workers, created a 'flexible' and disposable workforce, disenfranchised women through hidden gender discrimination, and de-professionalised groups within the welfare state. Alston (2015) points out that the impact of these neoliberal changes within the social services sector has been disproportionately suffered by women, including teachers, social workers, nurses, and members of other professions historically part of the welfare state. The gendered basis of the Australian welfare state replicates the roles disproportionately assigned to women in the post-war period, where many social provision 'jobs' were either poorly paid or not paid at all.

A greater extension of market ideology within the welfare state occurred post-1990 with the development of the Australian welfare reform process, which sought to change the nature of the relationship between citizens and the state (Alston 2015). As a consequence, Mendes (2014) elaborates, Australia's welfare policy approaches began to increasingly emphasise individualism and self-reliance, in the context of citizens' relationship to the workforce and the state, rather than their status and rights. What was occurring, in Castles (2001, p. 539) assessment, was 'the process of tearing down the edifice of Australia's distinctive model of social provision'. Similarly, Bryson and Verity (2009, p. 71) argue that

the transition within Australia ‘from wage-earners’ to neoliberal welfare state’ changed significantly the face of Australian social policy.

The effects of social policy processes, in McClelland and Smyth’s (2014) view, not only play to ideas of rational responses to social issues, but to political contests between groups and interests, and become fodder for processes of hegemonic domination. The relationships of power, influence and social policy, Jessop (1999) contends, have created a hard focus on transforming the ‘identities, interests, capacities, rights and responsibilities of citizens so that they may become active agents in the pursuit of a competitive edge in a global economy’ (Jessop 1999, p. 353).

Australian social work grew rapidly, and benefited from social policy approaches in the post-war era which contributed to the development and density of social welfare and health services. This, in part, according to McDonald and Reisch (2008), can be attributed to the congruence of social work values, ideas and aspirations with the Australian welfare state. Even with post-war expansion, social work remained a small and not particularly powerful entity in a sector that appeared meagre within the broader capitalist state (Meagher & Healy 2005). As McDonald and Reisch (2008, p. 62) put it, ‘social work could never play more than a minor role in the welfare regime’.

The consensus that underpinned the post-war welfare state in Australia changed considerably with the manufactured consent of neoliberal hegemony. The lack of congruence between post-war consensus values and neoliberal desires created a direct challenge to Australian social work’s ideological position. The attack on the Australian welfare system affected the maintenance of social welfare services across a broad range of social policy issues. According to McDonald and Reisch (2008), aged care services, disability services, and services to homeless people and victims of domestic violence, have all received increased attention through Commonwealth Government policy initiatives, albeit in privatised forms. The focus of contemporary social policy in Australia has reflected a marked shifting of resources from the public to the private sector, and the simultaneous transfer of the state’s responsibility.

The use of neoliberal policy approaches to hail professions has worked to limit policy options, narrow processes, quell social activism, and to ‘re-/de-professionalise’ disciplines, such as social work (Alston 2015, p. 42). The processes of privatising services have often been a hostile and contested environment for Australian social workers, requiring them to

make decisions that affect the quality of services and substantively contradict their training and beliefs. It has been, in McDonald's (2006, p. 10) view, a 'silent surrender of public responsibility' for social workers and increased their susceptibility to coercion and co-option to neoliberal practices. The likelihood of having to accept and confer credence on punitive approaches and ideas leaves social workers vulnerable to capture as an instrument of neoliberalism (Alston 2009, p. 43).

In Australia, neoliberal critique has been used to create distrust of expansive northern European-style welfare states, portraying them as reckless, expensive, and undermining of individual choice. The Australian welfare state, as Keith (a contributor) details, has been in decline for some time, and this has contributed to a gradual disaffection. He recognises that Australian social work has been both historically and intellectually linked to its post-war project:

> *Social work arose as a response to industrialisation. We no longer believe that welfare is the answer to anything and so it has become a very residualist concept. We haven't really seen the expansion of the welfare state in a very long time.*

Neoliberal ideas of the welfare state as dependency-creating, slothful and restrictive, have been pivotal in turning Australia towards broad market-based policy settings, rather than addressing issues of collective responsibility and social need.

Neoliberalism's distinctly different notions of professionalism and knowledge have made it difficult for social work in Australia to command a particular or stable identity. Its theoretical discourses, industrial position, and organisational prowess have all felt the impact of neoliberal managerial processes. This study considers the impact of neoliberalism on the identity and professional project, as well as the ways in which it has dealt with a post-welfare state as a contested discipline.

For social work, the gradual decline in its value is reflected in the increasing contestation of its historical socio-political project, and in doubts about the continuity of its position within the welfare state. Australian social work has come to inhabit a more conflicted and complex position under capitalism, where it is deployed as a re-enforcing agent of capitalism, in the implementation of neoliberal social policy ideas (such as mutual

obligation, e.g., 'work for the dole', in social security and employment services),[8] but is also depicted as part the problem as a non-market-based professional elite. Its efforts to critique neoliberal ideas and practices and bring about meaningful social change have been both pilloried and praised (Leonard 2001). Australian Social work is being hailed in different ways within the new neoliberal order of things, through the devaluing of its approaches, and its knowledge and practices as a project, which are said to be 'out of step' with market fundamentalism. In consequence, it is afforded little opportunity to develop alternatives, influence the public space, and be seen as important, making it susceptible to coercion, disgruntlement, and disillusion.

Social work in Australia is positioned somewhere between the post-war industrial welfare state and the new hegemony under neoliberalism. According to Keith, the hailing of social work to a new set of industrial circumstances foreshadows new, neoliberal relations of production:

> *As we move away from an industrial model into something different, the question is how does social work adapt? For example, if you look at, say, physiotherapists, they are not based on an industrial model but rather as an independent consultant. Social workers, in a way, are compensating for this by becoming more involved in the health system, so they are becoming allied health professionals.*

These new working relations are significant: where once individuals were employed in careers as government employees, they are now 'flexibly' employed as independent practitioners, sub-contractors or consultants. This has been most evident in the rise of short-term contracts, casualisation, and de-professionalisation (Wooden 2017). Social work has been hailed to this model through a process of de-professionalisation, and the restructuring of employment as individualised clinical practice.

[8] Mutual obligation requirements refer to the general principle that it is fair and reasonable to expect unemployed people receiving activity-tested income support to do their best to find work, undertake activities that will improve their skills, and increase their employment prospects (see http/guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/1/1/m/160).

THE INTERPELLATION OF SOCIAL WORK VALUES

Historically, social work's values have centred on individuality, acceptance, confidentiality, a non-judgmental approach, and self-determination (Banks 2006). These have contemporaneously evolved a sophistication as expressions of social and human rights for individuals and groups, and incorporate concepts of citizenship and citizenship rights. The values of social work have evolved through theoretical argument, debate and discussion, and have been inscribed through codes of ethics and standards of practice (AASW 2010). While values have been debated and inscribed in different ways, social work's location within the Australian welfare state has acted as a particular source of identity and legitimacy for social work.

One of the major value shifts under neoliberalism has been the elevation of libertarian notions of individual rights at the expense of collective rights. The values of individual responsibility, ascription of individual blame, and singularity of problem/solution have led to the evaporation of collectivist understandings of social issues. The individual, under neoliberalism, is reconstructed, with responsibility replacing need and competition replacing collectivist cooperation between individuals and organisations. As McQuigan (2014, p. 223) describes it, 'the neoliberal self combines the idealised subject(s) of classical and neoclassical economics – featuring entrepreneurship and consumer sovereignty – with the contemporary discourse of 'the taxpayer''.

McQuigan (2014, p. 223) goes on to point out that 'the transition from organised capitalism to neoliberal hegemony over the recent period has brought about a corresponding transformation in subjectivity'. The consequence is that individuals under neoliberalism view taxation and redistribution by governments with disaffection, and are seen 'to counter previous understandings of the individual in society' (McQuigan 2014, p. 233). This represents a fundamental shift in how the individual in society is understood. Rather than a prescription for personal freedom, neoliberalism has created a compulsory individualism in which everything is measured in terms of individual responsibility and personal performance.

Social work's claims to a distinctive set of values and beliefs based on social rights and collective concern is at odds with neoliberal ideas of individualism and consumerism. Neoliberalism has been able to promulgate a set of ideas of citizenship radically different from fundamental democratic ideas based on the greater good by evoking ideas of personal rather than collective responsibility. While the notion of the social rights of citizens has been

considered intrinsic to social work ideas, throughout much of its history, social work has been unable to effectively articulate and promote these ideas under neoliberal hegemony.

How to define social justice has been an issue for Australian social work. Several contributors take the view that this inability to define social justice in social work's project makes it vulnerable to neoliberalism. Jane argues:

> *Social work has no real idea of what kind of social justice it is really about. We want to claim that moral stance as a profession, and we write about it, but we really don't have the empirical evidence to show how people use these ideas in their practice.*

The transition to neoliberal approaches and ideas is complex for social work, where its claims of different and unique knowledge and practices conflict directly with neoliberal understandings. As Lesley elaborates, the pathways of negotiating neoliberalism are conflicted:

> *The idea of collectivism of professionals gives way to the stand-alone professional, individual with the ego boost of position, and takes away the collective identity. The model becomes working only with the individual, rather than working with groups.*

William believes that social work has failed to articulate its value claims, and suffers the intellectual consequences of appearing unclear about what it stands for:

> *We often talk about us as being a social justice profession, but in fact it's a new language for us. We're ahistorical as a profession, we appropriate concepts and say we have always been like this, and we universalise this to make a claim.*

This hailing of social work to a new individualism has, in Parton's (2008) view, been exacerbated by its failure to have a clear political project with articulated ideas and practices. The values of social rights are inevitably linked to questions of citizenship. As McCluskey (2003, p. 786) highlights: 'Citizenship defines relationships between society, government, and individuals; who belongs to the 'public' and what obligations and rights membership in that 'public' confers'. As notions of citizenship change so do notions of as rights and what is considered important knowledge and the ways in which such knowledge is countenanced and accessed.

Social work's claims to the ownership of social rights knowledge and ideas have been limited and made somewhat ambiguous because, according to Jennifer: '*Neoliberalism has challenged collectivism in many ways, and has focused social work more on individual problems and individualised solutions to those problems.*'

Neoliberalism's fundamental opposition to collectivism and universalist welfare support has seen it seek to shift social thinking towards self-reliance, and, in consequence, to depict social welfare and social work as self-serving and a social drain. The consequence of this shift toward individual social responsibility has escalated the demise of structural analysis, whether social or economic, of social issues. In McQuigan's (2014, p. 234) account, 'the neoliberal self is connected to a generational structure of feeling, a selfhood counter-posed to the old social-democratic self'.

For Australian social work, this has had a moral consequence, and has created a direct conflict with social work's established belief systems, values and understandings. This fundamental change in approach, Keith points out, undermines the integrity and values of social work:

> *The whole conversation has been turned around, whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, we looked at government as the answer and looked at social welfare as the answer to social problems. Social welfare is now being seen as the social problem.*

The challenge for social work is that, unable to escape the grasp of New Public Management (NPM)[9] and individualist notions of social problems, it becomes trapped in a dilemma of whether to forgo long-held beliefs to remain relevant, or to choose a path excluded from the policy, ideas and practices of social provision. Carey (2008b) argues that social work's hailing and transformation away from its accepted beliefs is evident in a new neoliberal consumerist model of social service delivery.

The individualisation of social problems has broader implications. For social work, it forms part of a transition to customerisation, where not only relationships are reconstructed, but individual identity and citizenship are also changed to comply with an economic imperative. The shift to neoliberal individualism is, in Jennifer's view, a form of 'victim blaming', and involves a complete reconstruction of the meaning of social work relationships:

> *The choice rhetoric aligned with neoliberalism, that you see everywhere, contrives that people choose to have certain lives, and that if they have social problems, or are poor,*

[9] New Public Management (NPM) is centred on the need for the public sector to be run along business lines, and to be accountable to those who benefit, either as citizens, taxpayers or government, who reflect the collective will (see Stark 2002).

or disadvantaged in some way, it is because they have made some individually poor choices.

According to Mary, relationships are remade through the rhetoric of 'choice' and individualised service models, with the consequence that neoliberalism has:

hi-jacked social work's historical and ethical claims, to 'starting where the client is', with the notion of the service user, [to] being seen as a customer rather than as a citizen, and shifts from notions of need to notions of risk, with consequences that are very, very different.

The consequence for social work has often been its placement in an invidious position of feeling the need to cooperate in this 'individualism', while at the same time being aware that it is undermining social work's value base. Australian social workers battle against both the actions and rhetoric of individual choice-making being important and at the same time dis-empowering. For Zoe, neoliberalism's contorted notions of choice mask more fundamental changes in the Australian welfare landscape:

The elevation of choice-based brokerage models, at one level, has given people individualised notions of choice, but on the other hand has been about cutting down the resources devoted to services, advocacy, policy and ideas.

The individualisation constructed under neoliberalism has significant consequences for individuals according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001). They argue that, 'modern society does not integrate them as whole persons into its functional systems; rather, it relies on the fact that individuals are not integrated but only partly and temporarily involved as they wander between different functional worlds' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, p. 22). The elevation of the individual is in part the consequence of the 'expansion of the nation-state (which) produced and affirmed individualization' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, p. 23).

The neoliberal version of the welfare state seeks to make the individual both the beneficiary and the responsible agent through 'enforcing the rule that people should organize more and more of their own lives' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2001, p. 23).

While giving the appearance of increasing consumer power and control within social relationships, neoliberal individualism, in Lesley's view, has had very destructive effects, where both workers and clients become individually responsible for their circumstances:

> *Positivist-focused social interventions are limited to therapeutic responses, for individuals to overcome their own misfortune. As a therapeutic response, it only works with individuals to challenge their attitudes and abilities.*

She goes on to describe how Australian social work has been drawn into a neoliberal managerial process, and an individualised model that encourages '*the social worker to do clinical work with the individual, and to focus upon changing the person through an individualised therapeutic model of responses.*'

Neoliberal notions of individualism have created a dilemma for social work values, caught between respect for the individual and being hailed to the new, neoliberal individualism: the uniqueness and significance of the individual are things neoliberalism embraces, just as social work ethics does. Transformational empowerment of people is something that neoliberalism sees as important.

One of the cornerstones of the hailing of social work to neoliberal practices and ideas has been the reconstruction of the individual. Social work has historically maintained a focus on the individual, and on the importance of such issues as self-determination, but this has been seen in a broader context, too. What neoliberal ideas of the individual have done is re-orient this focus away from structural and contextual concerns and towards individual responsibility and personal pathologisation. For social work, this has sought to usurp both its analysis and its voice.

HAILING SOCIAL WORK TO NEOLIBERAL LANGUAGE

Language forms what Gramsci terms the 'vernacular materialist turn' (cited in Ives 2004), where the common sense of hegemony is unified through language. In consequence, language forms an inherent part of any consensus, but also acts to sanction or promote particular interpretations. Part of neoliberalism's vernacular processes is to modify language's meaning and usage.

For social work, maintaining its values and beliefs in the context of neoliberal language is made more difficult by the way in which concepts are hollowed out or given new meanings, constructing choice, for example, as related only to the individual. In Mary's account of working in an Australian non-government organisation, it is:

> *very difficult to challenge some of the things that neoliberalism is offering, things like choice. How do you say choice is not a good thing? It's what is meant by 'choice'*

under neoliberalism, and its inherent consumer role rather than citizen, that makes it problematic.

The 'crisis of critique' described by Gounari (2006) defines how neoliberal language not only changes the meaning of things but also nullifies critique by way of a normalising 'common sense' through an appeal to undefined freedoms. In Lesley's view, social workers are vulnerable to seduction through language manipulation: '*Things that might be good ideas in themselves have been used in ways that do denigrate and victim blame.*'

The capture of language forms part of the process of hailing social work. As Crimeen and Wilson (1997) point out, social work must beware of being captured by the language of neoliberalism, particularly where it recasts and re-works language once 'owned' by social work. This, they suggest, both undermines social work's meanings and values, and acts to smooth the way for a new social citizenship. Mary cites the way in which, for example, community development ideas have been reconstructed in Australia and used by neoliberalism: '*Community development language has been used to maintain individual responsibility and community responsibility for things*'.

Terms familiar to social work, such as 'community', 'client', 'consumer', and 'industry', are hailed to an entirely new intent, and other terms, such as 'resilience', 'self-reliance', and 'risk', have also been promoted and rendered with particular individualistic significance under neoliberalism. Commenting on circumstances in Australia, Hugman (2001) describes how 'managing the social' has become the legitimate business of the state, in which the relationship between the state and citizens is primarily an economic contract.

Neoliberal language contains a duplicitous political intent, and presents complexities for social work's identity and ideals. As individuals are drawn to the dominant hegemony, the danger that Wendy describes is more than superficial: '*The danger of neoliberal language for social work is not just the nature of language change, but also its seductiveness*'.

The potential for the capture of social work through the naïve adoption of neoliberal language by workers to appease government is, in the view of Davies and Petersen (2005), a significant challenge. This may lead to professional knowledge being reshaped in neoliberal terms, and could have a transforming effect on accepted beliefs.

THE HAILING OF SOCIAL WORK TO THE NEOLIBERAL MARKET

While language plays a significant role in the construction of neoliberal hegemony, the organisational impacts of managerialism have had marked consequences for social work. The restructuring and corporatisation of organisations has led to new values: services are now businesses, based on completion of tasks. With the rise of New Public Management (NPM) and its use of marketisation and privatisation, social work has been hailed to new approaches to the meaning of service provision. Where once collectivist social concerns were the basis for aggregating need, individualised responses focused on private organisational practices are considered a way of ensuring efficiency of services, and of promoting individual motivation and responsibility. It is difficult for social work to forgo its historical understanding of the social world. Charles notes that one of the fundamental challenges for social work, in neoliberal times, is the way it has understood the social world: '*It [social work] is built upon understandings of the ways in which we are not independent in a sense, but interdependent*'.

Neoliberalism's use of NPM, according to Jessop (2003), has acted as a form of control through the introduction of fiscal restraint, and of new processes of accountability and control, while the market remains largely unfettered. As a consequence, social work has been made susceptible to co-option through these processes of privatisation and marketisation under state-sponsored neoliberalism.

While the universal value of neoliberalism is often depicted as market dominance through the privatising of the individual into the consumer citizen within a consumer culture, its influences have not been spatially, politically or socially consistent in all countries and across every sector of society. Its extreme dynamism, mobility and strategic entanglements militate against simple predictions of both its trajectory and the discovery of a set of generalised universal impacts (Ong 2006).

Even where there is clear evidence of the impact of neoliberal marketisation and managerialism on social work, these forces have produced markedly different effects (Baines 2006; Ferguson & Lavalette 2006; Garrett 2012). Some sectors within human services show significant signs of their structures, practices and established values being affected, based on profit. For example, in some sections of aged care and employment services, market principles have been applied, both in the way in which services are delivered, and also in the reconstruction of enterprises as commercial concerns. Other sectors have either had a more

muted response, or have escaped the marketisation mantra, particularly where it has been difficult to construct a profit-oriented service, or where commercialisation is unattractive.

The processes of being hailed to new profit-making have often stemmed from a conflict with value systems attuned to altruistic ideas of care and social responsibility. This direct confrontation between altruistic social values and new value systems based on marketisation and privatisation has led, in Dominelli's (1999) view, to social work's moral authority being compromised. The fundamental challenge is not only to values; as Harris (2003) sees it, it has also usurped social work's institutional and organisational legitimacy. Social work has become the excluded and oppressed victim of managerialism and globalisation (Gray 2004).

Mary examines these new values' broad policy and structural consequences for social work, and how they draw it towards business-based models of practice:

> *Organisations are now competing for funding for projects in competition with others, and want to own projects as part of a process of accumulating resources and kudos. They seek not to cooperate with others in the sector, and, often without realising, they are being ideologically shaped.*

Being hailed to new corporate values and practices has also occurred as a consequence of social work's own actions. According to Lesley:

> *I think social workers, in a way, have let that happen, and they are not sufficiently powerful in organisations to prevent it. They have been overwhelmed because social workers were not intellectually strong enough in their analysis and being strong minded to resist the flattery to their professional egos.*

The failure of social work to secure a political project seems at odds with the considerable body of academic literature that describes critical, and social justice and human rights approaches within social work, and which articulates political frameworks of a critical perspective (Fook 2002; Allen et al. 2003; Mullaly 2010; Ife 2012).

The processes of reconstructing organisations in the image of business have had direct consequences for social work practices. Neoliberal mangerialism's reliance on an outcomes model favours disciplines that have a history and a practice philosophy of discrete quantification. These process approaches exclude broader and more complex practices that have been an essential part of social work's approach. Social work has been drawn away from processes that engage with complex issues and that are difficult to document or quantify

in the workplace, resulting in a smaller and smaller number of practices. Kathleen reflects that the result of this has been to:

> *reshape our work and the way it makes it hard to think about the work in different ways, and when you centralise work you can speed it up, and when you dumb it down you don't have to hire qualified workers […] In the end […] it is very hard [for workers] to think beyond what they're doing.*

What happens under managerialism, according to Lesley, is an erosion of knowledge and skills that has a broader impact for practitioners:

> *Managerialism has taken control out of the hands of social workers and the nature of the work they do, and given the decisions to someone with management responsibility where decisions become based on less educated understandings of social functioning.*

Neoliberalism's proletarianisation of work, where discipline-specific knowledge and skills are discounted and replaced with routinised procedures, has drawn social work into redefined roles, accountabilities, and philosophical frameworks. Where once such knowledge and skill was an essential ingredient in organisations, Wendy argues that Australian social work roles have now changed:

> *They now don't employ social workers, they employ a case manager. The case manager will be a psychologist, et al., and the role is a set of functional skills that are competency-based and generic. Everything is generic, so you don't bring discipline and you don't bring knowledge.*

The reconstruction of work as generic and procedural inevitably moves control to management, at the same time devaluing disciplinary knowledge and skill.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

One of the key managerialist changes affecting social work has been the development and monopolising of individualised models of practice. One of the most common models of individualisation has been the use of 'case management'. This model has been drawn from other disciplines such as law and insurance, where quantifiable outcomes and individualised processes have been instilled as dominant forms to achieve goals that align with organisational objectives. The managerial shift, Michael explains, has subverted Australian social work's role more broadly within organisations: '*The advent of case management saw us take on more of a managerial and directive role in direct practice with people*'.

Social work has been drawn to these changes as a viable way of remaining relevant. It has also been encouraged by presumptions of increased efficiency and expediency of service delivery. Charles captures the polemical nature of these managerialist changes within Australia over a considerable period:

> *social work would need to learn how to play this game or it would become marginalised, and it has. So this is not something that has suddenly arrived; it has developed over time, and where we are now is at the end of a nearly 30year trajectory.*

Not only do these changes have significant consequences for social work practices, they have significant longer-term implications for social work professionals and organisations through the loss of knowledge, skills and professional recognition. As Ryan concludes: '*the whole managerialism and efficiency process has made social work environments less able to use their experience over the course of their career and to make decisions*'.

William details how the knowledge and skills of social work wither in this context:

> *The outcomes model has a standardisation that favours those who achieve their outcomes. That often means that other kinds of practices are not undertaken, practices that are difficult to document or quantify often become marginalised or erased in the workplace.*

The consequence, as Zoe portrays it, is a procedural dumbing down of the ideas of social responsiveness and social work knowledge and skills. Zoe expresses that in Australia the process of '*direct practice work has changed to more process work, of selecting from a menu*'.

This construction of knowledge and skills as neoliberal 'common sense' leads, over time, to an acceptance of managerialist ideas and processes, and to their hegemonic replication by social work. The proletarianisation of Australian social services, William notes, leads to a situation where '*the running of government services can be done by anyone. It's a managerial process, and what sorts of services are delivered becomes irrelevant as to who delivers them*'.

The need for theoreticians on broad social issues is replaced, in Singh and Cowden's (2009) account, by prescriptive provision of a service, both measurable and quantifiable. In this context, theorising is a luxury that cannot be afforded in the context of the specific demands of practice, and, consequently, what is considered essential social work knowledge

has been reconstructed (Harris 2003). For Carey (2008a), neoliberalism has created a matrix of administrative minutiae, contract management, assessment protocols, case plans, and an impenetrable regulatory framework. Australian social work must, in William's view, bear some of the responsibility for processes of proletarianisation and de-skilling. He identifies that it has not been terribly smart or strategic in its approach to dealing with these practice issues, and has consequently sped the demise of its professional position:

> *Partly I think it's that social work hasn't claimed its area of practice. I think it's never been accepted or strongly said that 'this is social work practice,' 'This is who we should employ,' and whether we do it well becomes an evaluative statement about social work. But at the moment, social work practice doesn't have much meaning at all.*

Social work education has also been hailed by neoliberal managerialism. A significant change to the role of academic institutions within the state has seen a devaluing of professional disciplinary knowledge and academic inquiry where there is no commercial reward. The consequence for social work education at Australian universities, as Wendy sees it, has been '*a focus on retention [of students], and this creates a drive to maintain students and compromise standards as a consequence of neoliberalism*'.

Wendy goes on to describe a broader impact beyond just a changed pedagogical agenda, one which goes into the fabric of the idea of the university:

> *Decisions that impact on Australian social work programs and their directions, that's all seen as irrelevant, because administrators now make all the decisions and the role of academics is to create career paths for these students.*

The knowledge base of Australian social work in higher education has been significantly depleted by the excision of social work from the policy processes that construct value in education. In the context of the commercialised university, social work as a discipline has been given less room to develop and expound the value of its knowledge. The result has been that neoliberal notions of individualism, combined with managerial processes, have sought to negate broad understandings of social issues, disadvantage and social problems, and to encourage social work to forgo its extensive experience, knowledge and skills of working with groups and communities.

SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE AND NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

The dominance of neoliberal knowledge reflects, in Singh and Cowden's (2009, p. 490) view, an 'erosion of the depth and breadth of ideas'. The consequence is that political processes of validation, and the restructuring of knowledge under neoliberalism, function to maintain hegemony through appropriation, or the denigration of ideas and practices. In Wendy's experience at Australian universities:

> *Neoliberalism doesn't like disciplinary knowledge. It doesn't like professional knowledge. It kind of reduces everything to nothing […] because the only knowledge that is valuable is managerial knowledge. So its procedural knowledge is knowledge about technique, calculability, measurability, and trying to measure the immeasurable.*

The denial of the legitimacy of social work knowledge and skills under neoliberalism forms the basis for strained relationships between workers and managers, and between government departments and non-government organisations, about policy and practice issues. The effects are often frustration and reluctant compliance in the face of little alternative. As Jennifer explains in the context of an Australian NGO, discussions with government bureaucrats are often frustrating and debilitating:

> *So we sit with government representatives and say this is really poor practice, you know. You are social workers, you work in these areas, and you know these are poor practices. And they say, but this is what we've been asked to do, and this is what you have to do, and this is the way you have to work.*

In Australian academic environments, social work knowledge is now regulated by managerialist processes, which seek knowledge that is of economic or marketable value to the university. This search aligns with practices to control knowledge production through quality assurance. Mary relates that, in her experience within the Australian welfare sector:

> *the notion of quality at the level of the institution is promoted as being a driver in this idea of quality, but in fact quality is understood as surveillance, so it's not about 'you are doing a great job of teaching,' it's about 'what's your retention'.*

Neoliberal knowledge within the university is aligned to government ontological ideas that are in turn aligned to notions of the corporation and industrial employment. Linda outlines that the processes of knowledge within Australian universities becomes:

> *a very controlled, competency-based, professional boundary, economic framework. There are stringent limits on academics in terms of recognition, prestige, autonomy,*

respect, and economic value of the academic outweighs teaching and learning as a social goal. It has led to denigration of the teacher/student relationship.

Not only have educational relationships been affected, but the proceduralising of knowledge, Wendy explains, has had a marked effect on the quality of social work education, and on students:

The curriculum is crowded out with competency-based stuff. So we only have two years with them and 10 courses because of placements, and we are trying to produce critically reflective practitioners in this tiny amount of time where they will be considered 'advanced practitioners'.

For Shaver (2001), these technologies of efficiency and accountability signify a shift from citizenship to social engineering; a situation confirmed by Jillian, who describes that there have been '*significant consequences for the nature of both working relationships and citizenship*'.

The hailing of Australian social workers to neoliberal practices, Mary argues, also operates through their emotional and psychological connection to their work: '*This has meant a need to demonstrate their worth in a neoliberal fashion through outcomes, numbers of clients, to demonstrate its worth in the economy*'.

This penetration of the minds of social workers, at both conscious and unconscious levels, often leaves them unable to recognise forms of social work that are outside the neoliberal agenda (Carey 2008b). Lesley argues that a weakness in theorising about social work knowledge and practice within Australia has been compounded by '*the lack of intellectual sophistication by social workers – something which places them at real risk of being sucked in to vanity and the ideas of clinical practice*'.

Fabricant and Burghardt (1992) conclude that these new managerial practices and structures expose workers to contradictory pressures and requirements, often resulting in reduced service in pursuit of neoliberal cost containment. In the UK, for example, 'market' rhetoric has displaced professional discretion with technocratic skills, and with a particular form of business thinking (Ferguson & Lavalette 2006).

This new consumerist model of social service delivery has had a significant transformative impact. In a study of frontline social workers in local authorities in the UK, high levels of demoralisation and alienation among social workers were uncovered, with a shift from 'depth' to 'surface' social work (Howe, cited in Parton 1996). Similarly, Dustin

(2007) describes how the replacement of conventional skills and knowledge with the requirements for efficiency, calculability, predictability and control through non-human technology are now common circumstances for social workers.

AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORK AND NEOLIBERAL POST-PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Two significant factors have affected professional identity under neoliberalism. Firstly, the de-professionalising of work through both procedural managerialism and the use of digital technology, and secondly, the proletarianisation of work through a conscious process of disempowering and devaluing certain kinds of work. In Healy and Meager's (2004) study, the de-professionalisation of social work highlighted changes in professional categories of employment, diminished professional roles, the routinisation of roles and tasks, and the rise of sub-professional positions.

These threats of the loss of a recognised professional knowledge, and its replacement with other disciplinary approaches, have worked to coerce social work into a new identity within neoliberal hegemony (Randall & Kindiak 2008). The multiplier effects of privatisation and corporatisation have resulted in greater managerial control, the fragmentation and casualisation of employment, lower pay, and increased surveillance (Waters et al. 2015). Through coercion and co-option, social work has been drawn into the neoliberal project. For social workers in Australia, Zoe concludes that:

> *I think you can see social work is seen as procedural, and social work is taking on that sort of role when social workers don't have a lot of choice at the agency level and are being moved to being an allied health worker with an output focus. This engages with an entirely different set of professional approaches.*

Social work identity, in Jane's view, remains fragmented, where there is a gap between theorising about social work and social work as it is practised in organisations:

> *One of the most powerful constructions of social work identity is who writes about it and what people read, which becomes the discourse, and that becomes the world of social work. How social workers make sense of their world, rather than focusing on the reified world of social work, has greater resonance.*

Webb (2015) highlights that neoliberalism's re-evaluation of social work's beliefs and values has had a marked effect on its identity, and on the value of many of its professional

attributes. Michael identifies that changes in the industrial landscape in Australia have had significant consequences for social work job roles and education:

> *We see that in the way that previously designated social work positions become generic positions, or in fact someone without a qualification is seen to be as good as somebody who has formal training.*

Not only does it reflect the hailing of social work to new practices, but also to what Howe (1996) describes as a shift from a 'depth' to 'surface' social work identity. Harris (2003) describes in detail this emergence of social work as business, where social workers perform the function of 'management consultants' to individuals. This shift in identity also reflects a confused position and identity for social work in contemporary society. Michael sees Australian social work's identity as conflicted:

> *I think social work's own discourse presents it as the rescuer, the Don Quixote fighting against government and repressive regimes, but never discusses openly our role in making those repressive systems translate into action in people's ordinary lives.*

Social work, as a consequence, has been relegated to a more tenuous position within society through the usurping of its institutional and organisational legitimacy (Harris 2003). The anxiety over professional identity encourages greater alignment with neoliberal ideas and approaches. As Michael sees it, there is increasing pressure to change Australian social work:

> *There is an encouragement to secure an identity like occupational therapy, through directions like evidenced-based practice. This fits neatly with neoliberal re-professionalisation, is cost-effective, and fits into the limitation of neoliberal notions of shared responsibility.*

The interpellation of social work into neoliberal hegemony does not require social work's acceptance of neoliberal ideas and practices per se, because the presentation of neoliberal ideas as dominant and without any alternative makes those ideas, in Zoe's view, both disempowering and inevitable at the same time:

> *You can see how social work is seen as more procedural. I think social work is taking on that sort of role often because social workers don't feel [they] have a lot of choice at the agency level.*

The penetration by neoliberalism of social work's professional identity has had particular consequences for social work agencies, structures and operations (Dominelli 1996; Harris 2003; Ferguson 2008). Social work has been required to accept a corporate culture,

increased procedural accountability, and a position outside policy development (Green-Pedersen 2001; Ferguson et al. 2006). While individual measures of neoliberal managerialism are not fundamentally antithetical to social work when it operates to undercut human value, Lesley contends that it damages Australian social work's value and identity:

> *What is not good is the reductionism contained within outcome measures when outcome and costing measures become the dominant paradigm, regardless of circumstance of human beings and their field of struggle.*

Lorenz (2005) says that social work identity has been fundamentally changed by neoliberalism. Social work's fundamental ideas and theorising become a luxury, its emancipatory capacity is eroded, and its essential knowledge discredited or reconstructed (Harris 2003). The great difficulty for social workers is to step outside neoliberal consciousness and to critically reflect on the impact of managerialist discourses on their practice (Carey 2008). Social workers, Lesley argues, can be easily interpellated by neoliberalism: '*If they are not intellectually sophisticated, they can be drawn into the vanity of neoliberalism's individualised notions of practice*'.

The processes by which social work has become inculcated into neoliberal hegemony have been long and convoluted. The path, Jane describes, has been '*the more welfare shrinks, the more unpopular it is publicly*'. Social work's legitimacy has become tied, in Jane's view, to Australian public and governmental attitudes to the welfare state:

> *Those neoliberal economists have really convinced the public, welfare is very unpopular. Any political party that seeks to get into government on the basis of a more compassionate society and to help the poor are never going to get into government.*

The conflicted nature of social work's identity within the contemporary context aids the circumstances of its interpellation by neoliberalism. The consequence, in Charles view, is that:

> *social work as a consequence is either reshaping itself in order to survive the environment, or it's suffering a diminution because it doesn't give in to that environment and insists on holding onto something else which makes its marginal.*

Wendy identifies that the danger intensifies for Australian social work the more it struggles to find an identity within neoliberal hegemony. Over time, social work becomes in her view more likely to become increasingly complicit in the neoliberal project:

> *I think social work has been seduced by governmentality and rationality. Social work has fallen victim, and is complicit in its own demise, because it jumps on those neoliberal constructions of professionalism and tries to bulk up on power.*

Significantly, the inversion of the functions of the state has created a scramble by social work, like many professions, to reconfigure and realign its identity. For Charles, attempts to realign the Australian professional project of social work have been limited and are less than productive: '*Social work has not focused on the new spaces in which we can be engaged in critiquing and finding alternate ways of responding*'.

In the context of neoliberal marketocracy (the bureaucratising of the market), Madhu (2011) argues that social work has been usurped, where other professions that mirror neoliberalism's procedural or managerial processes have become more dominant. Social work's disempowerment under neoliberalism, Baines (2006) suggests, accentuates the ease with which neoliberalism can realign social work to its own pragmatic ends.

For some, the vocational remodelling of social work along the lines of health professions, with enhanced private practice and consulting components, has surfaced as an answer to the crisis of identity (Trinder & Reynolds 2008; McNeece & Thyer 2004).

Social workers in Australia have, in Michael's view:

> *quite embraced aspects of the neoliberal agenda, such as competitive tendering, providing quality services and continuous improvement. So the relationship between social work and neoliberalism is a very dynamic one, with lots of unresolved tensions that are sharp on some of the edges.*

He goes further in testifying that the contemporary dilemmas of social work in developing its identity are not necessarily new:

> *There has always been a tension between the social care and social control functions in Australian social work, and the social control function has been absolutely embraced in areas like child protection, corrections, income support, and linked to social surveillance, and a lot of social workers don't see a problem with that.*

Wendy sees these forces creating a split in the way in which social work's professional identity is understood: '*Where some have been drawn to the pursuit of a pragmatic practice approach, rather than to the development and engagement with a broader socio-political project*'.

This issue of identity and of how to understand the social work project in the context of neoliberalism has been the centre of considerable debate. For some, alignment with neoliberal ideals of regulation, registration and individualised practice are inviting (Fotheringham 2018; AASW 2012). For others, this simply suggests a more complete interpellation of social work as part of the neoliberal project at the expense of social work's potential as a political and social project. There are strong critical accounts of social work identity and practice as a regulated, individualised project. The identity of Australian social work, for some, centres on maintaining a focus on the structural issues and collective concerns of disadvantaged groups (Fook 2016; Pease et al. 2016; Morley, Ablett & Macfarlane 2014; Mullaly 2010). Charles, for example, is critical of Australian social work's focus on what he sees as its own professional advancement at the expense of its political project. He suggests that, in advancing its own professional agenda at the expense of disadvantaged citizens, social work has been duped into believing that compliance will give it recognition and identity. Linda argues that Australian social work has been captured by neoliberal hegemony and encouraged to sacrifice its independence through '*clinical models, as part of a registered profession, and encouragement to construct an individualised social work as part of the individual registration of social workers*'.

Wendy is similarly critical of social work's efforts, suggesting it has '*embraced neoliberalism with profound effect to maintain a professional identity and currency*'. This effort to fortify social work's professional identity and boundaries in the interests of a profession, she suggests, has come at the expense of the interests of the groups social work seeks to serve. She outlines why she believes Australian social work identity is a central question:

> *I am not concerned that social work struggles to match these neoliberal professions. Social work's difference is in its structural and political analysis, being an advocate for marginalised groups, having that explicit understanding of social justice, and having a platform of working toward that, as opposed to working toward the social justice of the profession.*

Part of the issue, for Michael, is that social work has been left with few alternatives as a consequence of the pervasiveness of neoliberal hegemony, and of what he describes as the ease with which social work has been hailed:

> *It is too big for any discipline or group of people to tackle or to avoid. So, given that, and given our role to serve society, we really have to engage with neoliberalism, and*

> *my sense of social work is that, by and large, it has engaged with neoliberalism, but at the same time it has seen itself as a critique of it.*

He goes on to describe that the neoliberal hailing of Australian social work is a process where: '*Human services rather than social welfare becomes a growing area, and social work's role in those community-based environments has become a lot more ambiguous*'.

William also questions whether social work is out of place in a neoliberal world. Where once its industrialised welfare approach was valued, William suggests that, in Australia, it now struggles to find meaning:

> *Social work has moved from being a very small and somewhat irrelevant group with very small numbers, mainly in the non-government sector, to, in the late '60s and '70s, where social work expanded quite dramatically and is continuing to expand, making it somewhat unwieldy.*

This point is reiterated by Keith, who describes how Australian social work has shifted from a '*community cottage*' industry to a '*massified profession*', and, as a consequence, it has '*changed the way people looked at it – as a way to earn a living that became a means to an end*'. The Australian social context of support has significantly changed in Charles analysis:

> *As the political discourse has drifted, parts of politics that you thought might have supported a social work-friendly view of the world have set themselves against it as well, in many respects.*

The matter of social work's identity is not limited to issues of history, professional status and position. In Kathleen's view, far more telling are the consequences for the rights of clients and workers:

> *Workers are being remade as neoliberal citizens, and so are clients; the whole 'self-actualising self-starters who don't complain to government we just get on with it,' all of which is part of the narrowing of need.*

This change in the relationship with clients has had two effects: firstly, distancing social workers from the constituency they have sought to represent; and, secondly, implicating social work in a set of relationships that can ultimately further disadvantage clients. The unpalatable consequence, Wendy believes, is that this changed relationship saps the voice of social work: '*It has destroyed the heart and soul of social work, and has*

transformed social work into something else, something that's quite irrelevant, quite visionless'.

This makes a contemporary social work identity difficult to reconcile with the desire to work in ways that respect peoples' rights and empower them. While appealing to notions of accountability and efficiency in the delivery of human services, neoliberalism hails social work to a set of relationships that, while paying lip-service to offering individualised response, undermine the rights of clients and set social work on a conflicted ideological course.

CONCLUSION

There is evidence of the interpellation of aspects of Australian social work to neoliberal ideas and practices, producing significant consequences for its ideals, identity, and relationships. It has been co-opted over a period of 30 years, during which, evidence suggests, social work has adopted some aspects of neoliberalism. There is evidence, too, from educators of key areas where Australian social work has been hailed to neoliberalism. The acceptance of managerial processes and structures, the new individualisation of services, and the reconstruction of social services as dependency-creating are all examples of social work having either complied or mounted a limited response.

The hailing of Australian social work to neoliberal practices, some educators have identified, has been complicated by the profession's lack of a clear identity and political project. Social work has been compromised ideologically and philosophically, in the view of some educators, and has become conflicted in focus by its self-interested desire to position itself within a post-welfare state. This has set social work on a path to accommodating neoliberal ideas and practices, either consciously or unconsciously. In the next chapter, the thesis explores some of the ways social work has accommodated aspects of neoliberal hegemony. The hegemonic process of interpellation is, however, never total or complete, and the ways in which social work has avoided neoliberal processes or been more robust in dealing with its processes are explored.

CHAPTER 7
SOCIAL WORK'S ACCOMMODATION OF NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

Neoliberal hegemonic processes have positioned social work as both a useful participant in its hegemony and as an anachronism from a previous order unsuited to contemporary capitalism. Chapter 6 explored the hailing of social work in Australia, and the way in which neoliberal processes have sought to position social work as part of its hegemony. The result of those hegemonic advances has been some profoundly difficult challenges for social work.

Neoliberalism's challenges have brought varied responses from social work, and while some have seen it as a fundamental assault on its project, others see the resulting changes as simply part of an ongoing *liberal* project, albeit with altered structures and foci. The result has been that some aspects of neoliberal ideas and practices have been accommodated with little challenge, while others aspects have given rise to disgruntlement or fundamental resistance (Carey 2007; Harris 2003).

In this chapter and the next, the thesis turns to the ways in which social work has responded to neoliberal hegemony. The thesis so far has argued that neoliberal hegemony has constrained and diffused social work's ideas and actions, and created a climate where response is limited and frustrating. This chapter, drawing on neo-Gramscian portrayals of hegemony as a contested process, examines the way in which social work in Australia has responded by accommodating neoliberal ideas and practices. The chapter fleshes out the way in which the everyday relations of production, the institutions of the state, civil society, and global ideological processes of neoliberalism intersect with social work and create restrictions on its activity and ideas as a professional project (Bieler & Morton 2004).

In this account, it is argued that the processes of hegemony formulation and maintenance are complex and changeable, and that the instability of its ideological consensus provides social work with the possibility of resistance. This chapter argues that the hegemonic processes of neoliberalism work to build a temporary consent through processes of accommodation and coercion which, however, because of continuing ideological pressures, are never secured and assured (Hall 2011). For social work, efforts to

accommodate neoliberal hegemony therefore represent only a temporary positioning, and are prone to re-construction and redefinition.

Neoliberal hegemony is formed and reformed from a broad range of diffuse influences and responses, from the minutiae of daily life to broad intellectual and political concerns. To gain some understanding of social work's responses to neoliberalism, given the complexity of the topic and the breadth of possible responses, requires a rationale for making sense of the data. Drawing on Tianno's (1994, cited in Glassman 2011, p. 36) ideas, I have used the categories of accommodation, disruption and resistance to gather disparate responses in order develop a dialogue about responding to neoliberalism.

Hegemony, in Bieler and Morton's (2004) account, is a multi-layered process of relations of production, aspects of the state and civil society, and global world ideological orders. Jessop (1997) similarly views hegemony as having institutional, moral and ideological elements, as well as the physical environment of human actions that goes to shape thoughts and actions. Carroll (2009) suggests that these interact, coalesce, and form unstable and changeable confluences. In neoliberal times, hegemony is formed and reformed from all these aspects, which inform, influence and challenge social work's views, beliefs and actions.

Contributors and the literature provide a contested and illuminating account of the ways in which social work has responded to this hegemony, and the dialogue in this chapter is formed from these diverse interpretations and responses. In summary, the chapter develops a dialogue on challenges facing social work's ideas, practices and identity, and the way it has accommodated neoliberalism across a range of sites. This chapter acts as a link to further responses in the next, which explores the way in which social work has disrupted and resisted neoliberal advances.

ACCOMMODATING NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

Of course, social work is a neoliberal project. But simultaneously it is a lot of other things, too – just as when it was a liberal project.

The concept of hegemony was explored in detail in Chapter 3, and the ways in which social work has been hailed under neoliberal hegemony were addressed in Chapter 5. My attention now turns to responses to neoliberalism, both conceptually and practically. Neoliberalism is often seen as essentially a form of economic fundamentalism based on the 'primacy of the market'. This economic version of neoliberalism can be seen to have clear

ramifications across all aspects of society, and in many different contexts (Brenner & Theodore 2002).

As an economic ideology, neoliberalism purports to convey a universal truth, a purity of economic relations presented as unassailable. However, in actuality it is experienced as highly variable, divided by culture and context. It is, however, the aspects of neoliberalism beyond its economic functionality that give a better understanding of its nature and processes. The ideological, social and political elements of neoliberalism have been the main driving forces of both its success and its limitations. As Stuart Hall (2011, p. 708) explains, neoliberalism is 'not a single system, nor are all capitalisms neoliberal', and there are critical differences between its North American, British and Asian varieties. There is no value in an ideologically mono-cultural approach that fails to recognise both neoliberalism's internal inconsistencies and the disparate circumstances of its advance across the world. Its variability has significant impacts on both the way we might understand it and, consequently, on how we might respond.

The liberal project that has underpinned capitalism for more than a century has now catapulted itself into a profoundly different model of economic and social organisation (Bernheim & Rangel 2005; Plant 2010). What makes neoliberalism different is that it is more an assemblage than a dominant monoculture. It operates through the combination of many cultural aspects and styles that have the effect of limiting the possibilities of response (Carroll & Greeno 2013, cited in Fisher 2013, p. 131).

What is experienced as changed social processes and controls and altered regimes of governmentality has also reconstructed language and developed new notions of the individual, citizenship and consumerism (Harris 2003; Sewpaul 2006). After decades of taken-for-granted government support (however limited and at times misdirected), neoliberal rationality has created new polarities and re-asserted old dichotomies for social work.

The most fundamental challenges and uncertainties for social work have been created by the shifting of resources out of social provision, and by the preferencing of private over public development (Leonard 1997; Mendes 2003; Gray 2005; Ferguson 2004, 2008; Carey & Foster 2011). What is certain, however, is that social work has been unable to avoid responding to neoliberalism (Garrett 2009).

Social work has a history of adaptation to, and negotiation with, the changed ideological frameworks of the state. Under neoliberalism, this adaptation and accommodation

has been marked. Fitzsimons (2000) contends that much of social work's acceptance of ideological change is to do with its limited opportunity and ability to respond. Being part of the state has muted social work's ability to respond, and has limited its activism and resistance, though this has also been limited by a lack of political awareness (Findley & McCormick 2005; Baines 2006).

The complex and difficult terrain for social work, with changed economic and social circumstance and new social processes and controls, in part stems from its historically collectivist notions of social justice and equity. These changes, in William's eyes, challenge the intent of Australian social work; whether it should comply and survive, or resist and risk irrelevance:

> *Should it reshape itself in order to survive the environment, or suffer the diminution if it doesn't? Either it gives in to that environment or insists on holding onto something which will inevitably make it marginal.*

Keith surmises that, for social work, the contract with the state for social provision is different under neoliberalism:

> *The fundamental change is that we no longer believe that welfare is the answer to anything. It's become a very residualist concept. You haven't really seen the expansion of the welfare state in a very long time.*

The central historical benefits and ideas of the welfare state have come to be ridiculed as 'do-goodery' (Hall 2011), as a corrosive sapping of individual responsibility that has created dependency upon the state rather than self-reliance. Neoliberal hegemony is formed on fundamentally different assumptions about society, with distinct consequences for social work.

Not only have the ideas of social responsibility been usurped, but so, too, have the roles within the neoliberal state been recast. In this new context, Lynbery (2001, p. 377) argues that social work under neoliberal hegemony has a more coercive role, where collective concerns are replaced with individualised pathologising. The new skills and knowledge required by NPM frameworks work to shift power from social work professionalism to the procedural managerialism under which social rights evaporate and are replaced with individual responsibility.

The changed role of the state under neoliberal hegemony, with the evaporation of the welfare state consensus, has exposed issues that have lain dormant. Mayo (2015) explains

that the state, which has traditionally balanced two contradictory functions, advancing capital accumulation and ameliorating the worst effects of capitalism through services and the redistribution of resources, has now had the veneer of democratic social concern peeled away. What has been exposed, in Linda's estimation, is the fundamental consequence of contemporary capitalism:

> *The absolute cannibalism that is capitalism has become the only way forward. We are exposed not only to its excesses but its inhumane treatment of so many people across the globe, and its interference in the national politics.*

The sheer breadth and voraciousness of neoliberal hegemony has left social work with little choice but to comply with many of its requirements. Social work has become a part of this hegemony not by choice, but through the neoliberal mechanisms of circumventing its project, denying its knowledge, and giving it little option but to engage in a compliant manner. The manner of social work's circumvention is multi-formed, offering opportunity only in the context of stringent market consumerist notions of social provision, and seeking allegiance to simple interpretations of individual circumstances. Circumventions often have the creation of simple dichotomies at their core, such as good/bad, productive/slothful, innovative/change-resistant, lifters/leaners, etc., designed to categorise individuals and construct a language around them that allows no variance. For social work, the depiction of problems as complex, multi-faceted, and historical plays to self-interested professionalising rather than to the common sense of productive or unproductive.

THE ECONOMISATION OF SOCIAL WORK

Neoliberal hegemony heralds a new set of professional relationships for social work, centred on extolling the 'primacy of the market'. Davies (2015) describes how the 'economisation of all things' marks the application of positivist techniques of economics across all social and political realms. Social work has evolved in the post-war period, relaxed in its belief that its credentials for identifying social problems are reasonably assured, and has seen no value or necessity in considering the economics of social provision in detail. In part, this rested with presenting its issues, historically, as ones of human rights, and seeing economic constraints as being directly opposed to those rights. While there is a literature on the economics of welfarism, it remained substantially aloof from social work, and social work education. Economic understandings have remained relatively unfamiliar to social work; with the

consequence that social work was ill prepared to respond to neoliberal economism. Ryan outlines that Australian social work:

> *has had very limited exposure as a profession to the kind of economic models propagated under neoliberalism. While other professions have developed individualist private practice models, with consumerist applications, social work has not evolved in this manner.*

The consequence has been that social work's mounting of traditional welfarist arguments has not only been largely ineffective, but has acted as evidence of its inability to form part of a neoliberal approach. Social work has therefore had little choice but to comply with elements of neoliberalism's consumerist agenda. Aigner and Simons (1977, p. 305), writing in the 1970s, argue that social work's values are 'antagonistic to, and not congruent with the pure competition model of microeconomic theory'. Their assessment was that applying microeconomics to social work would not increase its efficiency but rather limit its vision and creativity. Mary concludes that, while social work ideas had currency within a welfare state, they have been superseded by neoliberal pronouncements: '*It [neoliberalism] has left social work dealing with issues of competition, smaller governments, self-care and increased managerialism*'.

The effect has been to constrict social provision in many areas, and to create new relations of production, what Harris (2003) describes as 'social work as business'. In this context, individuals become consumers, the state becomes the protector of business interests, and civil society becomes a realm for increased economic activity (Hall 2011).

Within a neoliberal economic model of social provision, positivistic consumerist approaches are dominant, and value is apportioned on the basis of economic productivity. For social work, this neoliberal economic model has been experienced prominently through privatisation and marketisation; the opening up of new areas of the public sector for private economic gain, and the reconstructing of services along private business lines (Brandt & Bouverne-DeBie 2009). Privatisation has worked to shift public assets to commercial interests, through either the sale of assets or the contracting of services, marketisation, through the restructuring of organisations, and corporatisation, through managerial proceduralism.

Contributors to the study highlight that social work within Australia has had not only to accommodate the restructuring of organisations along market lines, but has also had to deal

with the collision between market ideologies and traditional social work practices and processes. One of the significant challenges, according to Jane, has been the construction of quasi-markets within social welfare service. She articulates that '*if there is one aspect of the change in the system that has influenced the way welfare operates, then it's privatisation*'.

THE NEOLIBERAL DE-INDUSTRIALISATION OF SOCIAL WORK

Privatisation and marketisation have had a significant economic and organisational impact, as well as bringing about political and ideological changes that have come to underpin neoliberal hegemony (Cox 1989). Hall (2011) suggests that these dual processes represent an industrial undercurrent of neoliberalism intent on creating workforce flexibility and efficiency through procedural managerialism.

For social work, this industrial shift characterises a number of areas of contentious changes to working roles, identity, and the loss of skills. Managerial accountabilities have changed the nature of working relationships, and the way in which the individual is viewed and responded to, be they worker or client. There are profound political consequences for Australian social work, according to Lesley, in these new working relationships:

> *It has a really destructive effect on individualising workers and clients and creating a climate where individuals are responsible for their own misfortune. Social intervention is reconstructed as working individually with people to challenge their self-inflicted problems.*

Neoliberal managerialism has also developed new methods for the construction and validation of knowledge and skills through quantification, auditing and accountability mechanisms. Over time, Australian social work, has been drawn into these changes to some extent, Jennifer points out, sometimes in the belief that the restructuring of practices would be of benefit to clients:

> *Senior practitioners and managers saw risk assessment as a positive way of protecting children, and didn't see it as interrelating with neoliberal ideas. Yet when you reflect upon it, you can see really clearly that these things were interacting. So then the question arises, where does practice sit in this complex mix of forces?*

Jillian describes how the relationship between social work and neoliberalism is invariably complex, and has been confounding: '*Neoliberalism and its operational*

manifestations, including managerialism, have tended to run in parallel with other forces'.

Wendy describes the political underpinnings of new practice approaches. She cites the 'best practice' approach in the Australian context as an example of the way in which evidence is reconstructed to have a powerful political effect: '*Best practice is formulated for dominant interests, and doesn't challenge anything of the existing order. It doesn't challenge any of the existing power relations and existing arrangements*'.

Linda suggests that social work's ability to respond to these positivist constructs has been limited by continually having to deal with, and adapt to, altered work and management processes that have left it little room to manoeuvre. As Mary explains, the accommodation of neoliberal processes and practices in Australia has often occurred because '*the speed with which this whole notion of evidence-based practice has evolved has had the effect of really sucking social work in*'.

The difficulty for social work, as Zoe sees it, is in trying to transcend this kind of hegemonic 'neoliberal common sense' in the context of everyday pressures. She laments that: '*People often don't recognise neoliberalism for what it is, or know how to identify it*'.

William explains part of the difficulty of contending with new neoliberal managerialist practices: '*Social work lacks the background and skills to meet these new commitments effectively. Traditional qualitative holistic approaches of social work are now viewed as 'archaic' and dependency-creating*'.

Here, Michael describes how new managerialist approaches are not necessarily so unfamiliar to Australian social work: '*Social work engages quite well overall with the functional aspects of neoliberalism; although it doesn't engage particularly well with the broader conceptual aspects of neoliberal values*'.

This alignment between aspects of social work and neoliberalism has also fostered a pragmatic opportunism for a new, individualised professionalism, based on private practice, expertise and consultancy among some sections of social work. In part, this has been driven by the desire to revitalise practice approaches and to improve accountability, and by the acceptance of risk management models of practice. However, Wendy believes that it has also been driven by the desire for status and position within a neoliberal hegemony.

The underlying rift between social work's philosophical underpinnings of social justice and the newly imposed materialist context remains problematic. Jillian claims that, in Australia:

> *managerial practices have taken control out of the hands of social workers by regulating the kind of work in which they become involved. The consequence is they are redirecting work as is seen fit where others now make the decisions, and do so without an understanding of social functioning.*

While the acceptance of managerialist ideas and new industrial processes of increasing efficiency and accountability has been widespread, they remain difficult to implement, as Kathleen describes:

> *The competitive neoliberal model is not the one that tends to work in most Australian social work workplaces. It is the model that's supposed to operate but doesn't necessarily occur.*

Harris (1998, p. 859) also warns that 'we should be cautious of representing the new managerialist social work labour process as a complete and unambiguous triumph of the right's ideology'. While there is significance in neoliberal managerial practices and approaches being developed, their success has been limited by failures to deliver efficient outcomes, and by resistance from both clients and workers. Some traditional social work practices remain embedded, and act as a default when neoliberal approaches aren't effective. For clients, traditional notions of support are also often embedded and difficult to shift.

SOCIAL WORK'S IDEOLOGICAL ACCOMMODATION OF NEOLIBERALISM

Fairclough (2000), and similarly George (1999), describe neoliberal hegemony as a different kind of ideological process that operates by cultural fragmentation. Carroll and Grenno (2013, cited in Fisher 2013, p. 131) provide some clarification by suggesting that neoliberalism forms only a 'thin' ideological hegemony, a weak social cohesion that manufactures 'consent' without forming a deep cultural and civil society 'consensus'. It survives, in their view, not by the creation of a coherent ideology, but rather as an assemblage of multiple elements that don't necessarily align, but which operate to include and exclude through an adaptable 'common sense'.

McAuley (2003) positions exclusion at the core of neoliberalism, and suggests that its anti-collectivism is evident in the way it individualises social issues to thwart collective

responses. What remains hidden, George (1999) claims, is neoliberalism's political strategy to elevate and defend established elites against groups with opposing views or agendas. Those groups who represent a threat to the power and interests of dominant groups are excluded from the processes of democratic governance by the development of relationships directly with individual citizens.

Ideologically, social work's fundamental interest has been to understand and respond to social issues within a social context. In Australia, collective approaches have, to some degree, evaporated, and consumerist practices have replaced public sector services. In this context, social work, as Jane describes, struggles to find an ideological coherence: '*Social work has failed to develop a coherent political project to defend against neoliberalism*'. This, in her view, can explain aspects of the apparent ease with which neoliberalism has been accommodated by social work.

One of the key ideological foci of neoliberalism has been the individualisation of all aspects of society. The individual becomes identifiable, responsible and choice making within neoliberal relationships (Carroll 2009). The result is a shift from democratic citizen to consumer that dovetails with wider neoliberal connotations of a move from state to market; from collectivism to individualism and from public service to private resource. (Clarke 2007). For Hall (2011), there are two stereotypes of the individual under neoliberalism: the 'taxpayer', overtaxed and leached off by scroungers; and the 'customer', free to act in the market and to expect choice and personalised service.

Social relationships within social work have both ideological and practical functions. The ways in which individuals, be they clients or workers, relate to one another and are viewed by the state define the expectations of individuals and responses. Under neoliberalism, the 'social citizen' and 'economic citizen' merge to become the 'individual consumer', defining, as a consequence, the meaning of social relationships. The effect, in the context of social work relationships, is that the 'economic citizen' becomes idolised, the welfare recipient demonised, and social relationships defined in 'consumerist' terms. Relationships for social work, once defined by social need and notions of historical and structural disadvantage, therefore become focused on the production of motivated and self-actualising consumer-citizens. Jennifer articulates the ideological reconfiguring of the individual within neoliberal social work relationships as follows:

> *People have individual agency and they create their own lives through the mechanism of free choice, and it silences or precludes us from talking about structural issues that are impacting on people's lives.*

Kathleen further explains that, in the Australian experience, there has been a compounding effect within worker–client relationships, where individuals' attitudes, rights and values have changed:

> *Workers are being remade as neoliberal citizens, and so are clients. They are both formulated as self-actualising self-starters who don't complain to government, we just get on with it. The end result is the narrowing of needs.*

This ideological shift has been acted out over time and in a number of subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Peck (2010, p. 107) suggests that progressive waves of neoliberal reform in the welfare sector have 'incrementally remade conditions in, and around, contingent labour markets. In the process, new social contours of inclusion and exclusion, and new norms of employment and un(der)employment, have been forged'.

There are, however, quite different interpretations of the position of social work in relation to neoliberal hegemony. For many, neoliberalism as an ideology is seen to not align with social work's structural understanding of its role, or its approaches to practice. Others, however, see a closer and more mixed relationship between social work and neoliberalism. Michael, for example, interprets Australian social work as having an inherent alignment with neoliberal individualism:

> *One of the great difficulties is that social work's value base fits quite neatly with a whole range of underpinning values of neoliberalism. Not all of them, but the importance of and uniqueness of the individual is something that neoliberalism embraces, as does social work ethics.*

This account, while explaining how some of social work's elements of individual relationships can be drawn to, and accommodate, neoliberalism, fails to decipher the complexity that has underpinned social work relationships and the structural nature of individuals' circumstances. Ultimately, alignment with the neoliberal rhetoric of individual 'choice' means that social work's ideological identity is compromised.

The pervasiveness of neoliberal individualism, and its simplistic analysis of people's lives, makes neoliberal notions of choice a difficult rhetoric to effectively argue against or defuse. Not only are social relationships affected by these elements of consumerism, but,

according to Ryan, social work's vision, too, has been constrained and inhibited by neoliberal individualist consumerism:

> *Social work becomes a service-oriented, consumer kind of model that narrows its perspectives. Within this kind of consumerist model, it's not easy to be critical and focus on broader structural issues, which becomes more accentuated over time.*

Using a broad example, Mary outlines how neoliberal ideology inevitably narrows the field of vision for social work:

> *If you consider that intergenerational poverty, for example, is somehow in a person's DNA, then you become influenced by the ideas of the pathologies of people. The social worker in this circumstance can be drawn to clinical work aimed at changing the person.*

Contextually, the reconstruction of the individual in consumerist terms under neoliberalism highlights the primary importance of citizenship as an issue for social work, as well as what should be done and how it should be done. The central binary of Australian citizenship under neoliberal hegemony, Linda suggests, is important to understand, because a neoliberal agenda establishes citizenship in quite different ways*: 'The individual is either an economic powerhouse or an economic bludger, either contributing to the economy by working and consuming, or [harming it] as a drain on society*'.

While consumerism presents a model of the empowered individual making decisions within a fair and unfettered market, the social and political outcomes for individuals are significantly different. The great ability of the individualistic neoliberal binary is both to shift responsibility for individual circumstances away from capitalist inequality, and then to reconfigure it as personal slothfulness or ineptitude**.**

SOCIAL WORK AND THE ACCOMMODATION OF NEOLIBERAL INDIVIDUALISATION

One of the key pursuits of neoliberalism has been to reconstruct the relationships between individuals and the state. In the past this relied on professions to act as intermediaries to apply specialised knowledge or to provide specific interventions, which had the effect of keeping the state at arm's length. Under the new neoliberalism, contracted professional expertise is diffused, and the contract is more directly between the state and the individual. The individualisation of relationships has enhanced the power of managerialism and

redefined the nature of the individual as a result. Social work in Australia has been marginalised from the professional control of its social relationships, and the negating of its professional knowledge and power has required it to change both practices and approaches.

Jennifer claims that, within Australian social work, one of the key contributions to the development of individual consumerism has occurred through the redefining of social work roles and skills. She feels there is considerable pressure to reconstruct social work as a regulated post-industrial profession: '*Increasing pressure to codify roles and jobs, often with the acceptance of the professional association has changed the way in which social work operates*'.

Individualisation has occurred in Australia, in Lesley's view, partly because '*social workers, in a way, have let that happen. They have not been intellectually strong enough in their analysis of the impact of individualisation*'.

There have also, however, been professional inducements to social work to engage in the development of consumerist social work practice. In the context of child safety, Jillian relates a circumstance with which she is familiar:

> *I would hear social workers calling themselves 'forensic social workers', and there was this professional groundswell searching for this more sophisticated profession. Managerialism and professionalism were running along in parallel.*

Lesley concludes one reason for this has been that: '*Social work has not been strong minded enough to resist the flattery to their professional egos of the elevated consumerist professional*'.

Jennifer suggests that the breadth and scope of the changes has provided little opportunity either to critique the model as a process or to evaluate its effects:

> *Social work has been drawn into the individualised consumerism model, and many social workers have simply had to toe the line and act as gate keepers, and as the state's enforcer.*

The individual consumerist model is not as universal in its application as might be suggested. Kathleen claims that proceduralist consumerist approaches often don't work, and that conventional social work processes are applied surreptitiously. Jennifer concurs, and suggests that, while consumerist approaches may appear prominent in Australian workplaces, they have been less than dominant, and have been undermined either by their own failures or by workers:

Positivistic models of social relationships are still limited in many contexts, and rub up against social work's structural disciplinary background of viewing issues within their social context for many workers.

One of the powerful ways the ideological process of neoliberal hegemony is established and maintained is through language. As Massey, Rustin and Hall (2013, p. 3) describe, 'the vocabulary we use, to talk about the economy in particular, has been crucial to the establishment of neoliberal hegemony'. McGuigan, (2004) suggests that under neoliberalism some language is reinforced under neoliberalism, for example, 'flexibility', 'governance', 'employability', and that others are made unspeakable: 'exploitation', 'domination', and 'inequality'. Both promotion and suppression act to limit debate and create an accommodation (Holbrow 2015).

As Gregory and Holloway (2005) point out, language is the mechanism through which social work has reconstructed its identity, developed its relationships and defended itself. Within a neoliberal framework, social work language has been co-opted and reconfigured so that words like 'empowerment', 'community' and 'individual', for example, take on quite different ideological meanings. Hay (1995) describes how the use of language within neoliberalism acts as part of a process of interpellation where alignment is created to words and their usage, making citizens ready subjects and willing participants in moral panics. Neoliberalism draws upon crises and panics constructed by the particular use of language as a technique for maintaining hegemony.

The key to this ideological coherency, Neubauer (2011) argues, is the repeated activation of the key frames of hegemony. In neoliberalism's case, the instruments are the 'sanctity of the market', the 'evil of the state', and the 'centrality of the consumer'. The reconfiguring of language and knowledge also affects the way in which issues and circumstances are viewed and understood.

Wehbi and Turcotte (2007) provide an account of the way in which language is corrupted, where progressive structural social work theory and practice approaches, such as anti-oppressive practice (AOP), are reconstituted as a brand and reconstructed as a marketable commodity, thus disempowering their ideas and intent. Jillian explains the force with which managerial ideas are directed toward Australian social workers and the difficulty of resisting:

> *You are fighting forces that go beyond a managerial change of culture. You are also talking about changing the language that is deeply embedded in pretty inflexible systems. This then exposes the level of the task of seeing how you might shift those ideas.*

Wendy observes that social work in Australia has sought to construct practices and knowledge that are quantifiable. She feels that the construction of language and knowledge under neoliberalism align with the ways in which we understand the social world:

> *Social work, like philosophy after Plato, has sought to calculate and measure truth and, in the process, [is] losing thinking and thought. We mistake 'thought' as calculability, rationality and measurability, and participate in our own demise.*

Part of the effect of this on social work has been that the requirement to comply with neoliberal practices has also forced it to change how it sees and measures social issues and concerns, or at least not to display and debate them.

THE NEOLIBERAL DE-PROFESSIONALISING OF SOCIAL WORK

The structuring of a profession on the basis of skills, knowledge and recognition is common to many disciples. Professional control and power are maintained through the processes of admission, standards of practice, training and professional cultural myths (Seddon 1997). Social work has generally followed this classical professional model seeking to identify specialised skills and knowledge and define and articulate roles.

The restructuring of roles and relationships under neoliberalism has acted to de-professionalise social work through the devaluing of its skills and identity (Dominelli 1996; Dustin 2007). Harris and White (2009) describe this shift as the replacement of the 'bureau professional' with 'flexible process workers'. The process for de-professionalisation in post-industrial society has seen work become proceduralised, broken into segments and routinised (Fabricant, & Burghardt 1992; Hall 2001). This proceduralising of social services in Australia, William concludes, is the ultimate intent of de-professionalisation:

> *The running of government services can be done by anyone. It's a managerial process, and the sorts of services that are delivered, and who delivers them, becomes irrelevant as work is micro-managed and proceduralised.*

Wendy describes the politically duplicitous nature of managerial changes, where they seek quantification, accountability and efficiency, but hide a process of de-skilling and

proceduralising: '*The technical application of skills and knowledge is in line with Braverman's thesis,*[10] *and is essentially about deskilling under the guise of professionalism*'.

Seddon (1997) agrees, citing the effects of de-professionalisation within the education sector, that managerialism has acted as a governmental device to shift work to an instrumental and marketised format, albeit with professionally friendly language. Baines (2008, p. 3), in exploring the new regimes of accountability, legitimation and control, suggests that the practice of managers coaching employees in purported 'best practices' has the tangible industrial effect of controlling and standardising work. While arguing that this increases professional competency and efficiency, and streamlines practices, it in effect gives managers greater control by reducing or removing discretion, and monitoring the speed and volume of work. This means that people and organisations are forced to compete in a constructed competitive market. Zoe explains that, in the present Australian context:

> *Social work positions have to demonstrate their worth, and in particular ways; through the number of clients seen, the services provided, the meeting of individualised objectives, and that the individual exited within a certain timeframe.*

The process of hailing social work to a market-oriented approach has been aided in some ways by Australian social work's historical adaptability to ideological change. As Jane puts it:

> *Social work has always worked around the policy. We always make the policy fit the client. Social work will survive because of that very strong ability to accommodate and acquiesce.*

However, social work's ability to accommodate, adapt to, and ultimately modify state ideology has been predicated, in the past, largely on the state's benevolence. George (1999) suggests that neoliberalism is fundamentally different, considering state intervention anathema, professional elites self-serving, and welfare recipients 'vagabonds'. Social work's accommodation is used in this context to disassemble the arrangements and assumptions cemented under the welfare state. Contemporary capitalism in neoliberal times Ryan describes as almost turbocharged:

[10] See Braverman (1974).

> *A more accentuated version, where the stakes are higher now. Before, the state had its problems, but at least some of the values of the welfare state were congruent with social work.*

The accommodation of neoliberal practices also comes with risks to social work's identity and legitimacy. Zoe warns that compliance by Australian social workers with new measures ultimately influences how they practise:

> *Social work gets practised in a particular kind of way, and the sorts of policies that are being produced by government and being put into practice mean that social work gets practised within those constraints.*

The effect, Mary informs us, is '*the evaporation of structural and collective approaches*', and the limiting of opportunities for the development of other forms of relationships and practices.

While social work has the potential to be squeezed out as a profession as part of a market-oriented approach to work, Seddon (1997) claims that de-professionalisation is not simply a process of deconstructing professions, but rather a way of regulating them within the state. In his view, new professions under neoliberal managerialism become more highly regulated. This new process of regulation occurs through forms of accountability, surveillance, and proceduralisation of work. Harris (1989, p. 859), however, suggests that the outcomes of de-professionalisation are inconclusive:

> The shift to the new managerialist social work labour process, may result in struggles to determine the directions in which managerial discretion will be exercised and a potential for new alliances of interest between social workers and service users may emerge.

In essence, while the development of managerialist practices and approaches is evident, they are prone to being less effective when confronted with sophisticated knowledge and approaches.

SOCIAL WORK IDENTITY IN AN AGE OF NEOLIBERAL ACCOMMODATION

Within the democratic welfare state, professions were offered a specific relationship with the state, providing, as Randall and Kindiak (2008) set out, status, identity, and position within society. In return, the state gained control over policy, processes, and resources. Social work has historically struggled for professional status and identity within the welfare state

(Dominelli 1996). Its claims to specialised knowledge and skills have been often challenged, and it has relied on its alignment with the objectives of the state and society. Under neoliberalism, Mary claims, '*the state has changed its ideological position around welfare*', and social work, as a consequence, has had to rethink its position and reconsider its identity. Dominelli (1996) explains that both the radical and neoliberal perspectives have critiqued the traditional model of social work as an elite profession, albeit for quite different reasons.

The neoliberal critique has denigrated the traditional model of politically supported social provision by the state, wound back support, and devalued social work as a profession (Dominelli 2004; McDonald 2006). From this perspective, social work approaches, which once had an accepted and somewhat secure identity, are now considered 'archaic' or 'self-serving'. The crisis of professional identity is not unique to social work, but, since the 1980s, many professions have come under considerable scrutiny, or direct attack, from neoliberalism (Rogowski 2011; Duyvendak, Knijn & Kremer 2005). For Hill (2001) this is the result of the state changing configurations of the social, economic and political relations in late modernity, and of new patterns of governance in the neoliberal state. For social work, this 'is characterised by fragmented service provision through specialisation and contracting out' (Dominelli 1996, p. 157).

The pursuit of a professional identity under neoliberalism raises old debates for social work. Jane suggests that desire for an Australian professional social work identity is strong but is affected by internal debates about what it would look like:

> *There is still a strong sense, I think, of becoming a profession, and the desire to open up the profession, which would give us more political clout, as opposed to keeping the profession pure. I think there is a core, not just here but internationally, that have a strong identity, and a big enough core to keep the profession going.*

The search for identity, some suggest, has led social work to a complicity with neoliberal objectives, and to the abandonment of Australian social work's broad social goals. Wendy argues that:

> *The AASW has been complicit in demeaning the coinage of the profession as a discipline and it has done so at a time when other professions have raised the bar.*

Debates about the identity of social work in Australia have challenged the professional association's efforts regarding regulation and registration. For Linda, the

association has served to accommodate neoliberal ideas of a managerialist-regulated profession:

> *The AASW has almost singlehandedly served the masters of neoliberalism because of their obsession with a small cohort of medical social workers who professionally see advantage as being defined by registration.*

This positioning leads, in the view of some, to a de-skilling and de-professionalisation of social work, and plays into neoliberal notions of individualised, consultant-style practice. In Wendy's view: '*Positioning social workers as second-rate health professionals and third-rate psychologists provides them with nothing distinctive to offer. So they actually become irrelevant in the neoliberal market place*'.

A focus on a social work professional identity that can accommodate neoliberal practices, Linda claims, relegates social work's concern for disadvantaged citizens to a less than prominent position. Charles similarly questions why it is that Australian social work as a profession has so easily been conscripted to managerialism, and he laments the focus on such a narrow agenda for the profession. He asks: '*What are we doing about the argument about shared responsibility, where the people who are not doing so well actually have opportunities?*'

Wendy similarly argues that narrowing the identity debate plays into neoliberalism. She comments:

> *The association and its campaign for registration is a classic example of accommodating to neoliberalism, and it's one of the only things the AASW has campaigned about in the last decade.*

The lack of a clear political agenda, in Jane's view, invites social work to withdraw:

> *We can't find an answer in the present, but we keep harking back to a time when it was better for some, a radical nostalgic social work for something that wasn't really there. It's a reactive response, not a proactive one.*

In a similar vein, Charles claims that Australian social work has done much to accommodate neoliberalism by its own self-absorption. He describes social work as:

> *too busy regretting the things of the past, where not everything about the past was good, anyway, and in not having a political and ideological project, Australian social work has not sought out the new spaces in which we can be engaged in critique, finding alternate ways of responding that don't have to fit in with neoliberalism.*

Part of the difficulty, Jane suggests, is that the social work profession in practice environments has not been able to counter neoliberal ideas. Social work has not always been able to articulate why neoliberal welfare policy is not the best option. Kathleen offers that this has been compounded by social work's naivety: '*It has become positioned as a valuable tool of neoliberalism, as a buffer with regard to those considered 'problematic' or 'difficult''*.

The professional association, however, holds a conflicted position (Healy & Meagher 2004; Fook 2003; Ife 1997) in that Australian social work has paid particular attention to social justice as part of the profession, but this has been stridently tested under neoliberalism, where it is also required to comply with policy changes. Australian social work, like many professions, has found it difficult to articulate an alternative and establish a clear identity.

SOCIAL WORK AND THE ACCOMMODATION OF NEOLIBERAL KNOWLEDGE AND LANGUAGE

Neoliberal processes of hegemony involve the reconstruction of knowledge and language. Neubauer (2011) identifies that the marketisation of knowledge under neoliberalism focuses on the consistent theme of creating market value to produce wealth. It promotes the decline of 'unproductive' institutions, such as the welfare state, and the elevation of the individual consumer as the source of legitimation. These reflect, for social work, not only the marketisation of knowledge, but also new processes of accreditation and denial. Wendy describes the consequence of neoliberal knowledge processes: '*everything is being levelled. We don't have disciplinary expertise, we just have stories*'.

Waters et al. (2015) chart the shift away from professional elites toward economic elites with the result that de-professionalisation creates a loss of political and intellectual power that might have challenged neoliberal hegemony. The processes of proceduralising and de-contextualising knowledge have also been applied in the university. This has reformulated educational institutions as economic institutions, creatures of the market, where education shifts from being a knowledge endeavour to a consumer product.

The consequence for disciplines such as social work is that they are now required to fit their knowledge within product statements, and their pedagogical processes into a consumerist, user-friendly format. Sally relates an example from the UK, where social workers are trained in very short time frames. She claims that in the Frontline Education Program:

> *the best performing graduates from other programs were selected and put […] through a social work course in five weeks, specifically for child protection. It is nothing but a proceduralising of social work, and has a huge marketing campaign attached.*

Within this model, educational institutions become contemporary factories aligned to the market, and the social work educator and students become both consumer and product. The accommodation of this commodification of work, seeing academic work as product and student as consumer, marks a fundamental shift in the way education is understood. Not only does it move the focus of academic institutions from pedagogy, research and the pursuit of knowledge to developing education as a product that is consumable by the market, it also alters and reinterprets the relationships of students and academics. Wendy raises concerns about the accommodation of these new relationships in Australian universities under neoliberalism. The result, for both students and academics, is that they are recast in purely economic terms:

> *I'm now not an academic, I'm a management consultant. You are not students, you are commodities, and social work is not a profession, it's a product. And critical social work is not a philosophy, it's a brand – perhaps a quirky brand that makes us distinctive in the market.*

The rise of the neoliberal university has led to the commodification of relationships between students and teachers, and between workers and the university. One aspect of this has been the quantification of relationships in managerial terms, and the framing of the university as an economic entity, often through the use of accountability and evidence mechanisms. One of the consequences has been a move away from the academic pursuit of knowledge for its intrinsic or social benefit, and towards activities that are seen as most profitable, or that enhance the university's status and position. Linda describes how, in the Australian higher education sector, there has been a 'hollowing out' of disciplines: '*The loss of scholarship and discipline-specific knowledge and autonomy of the academic to engage in real scholarship is significant for social work.*'

The valuing of those things that bring economic benefit or position to the university is compounded by accounting mechanisms aimed at maximising university growth. What sectors of the university have had to accommodate, and what has become currency within disciplines, Jennifer sees as '*the imperatives of the budget, and dealing a lot with marketing and how we position ourselves*'.

Mayo (2015, p. 31) describes the significantly changed role of education under neoliberal hegemony, where the focus is upon ‘education for the economy; more precisely lifelong learning for the economy, is said to perform a crucial role in attracting and maintaining investment by catering for ‘employability’. The effect is to link education directly to employment outcomes, and to redefine capital as the controlling interest. Neoliberal marketisation leads education away from the student, the academic, and from the university as a democratic institution of civil society, towards becoming private businesses.

Mayo (2015) depicts not only how education has been redefined as the pursuit of a business framework, but also how resources have been redirected towards those disciplines that can demonstrate a direct link to employment. Efforts to reconstruct universities as vocational training institutions have benefited some disciplines, generally those with clear job alignments, or those which hold economic prestige, but this has occurred at the expense of universities as sources of broader knowledge and understanding. For Australian social work, this has become a double-edged sword, for while on the one hand it has specific vocational purposes and connections, it is generally not considered a prestige vocation, or one requiring highly specialised technical skills.

These efforts to construct Australian social work as a vocational commodity have had significant consequences for the recognition of its disciplinary and intellectual ideas. For many educators, the problem of articulating a meaningful social work has been exacerbated by the new regulation and competency requirements of the neoliberal university. In New Zealand, van Heugten (2011) describes the dilemma faced by social work academics caught within the competing demands of the commodified state and neoliberal universities. Efforts to commodify disciplines such as social work into a collection of skills and procedures present considerable risk to their intellectual foundations. William concludes that the result for Australian social work is that it is at:

> *a crossroads, in some ways, about where we are going to go educationally. We exist because we have been located in universities for such a long time, and that gives a very powerful discourse to the world, but to what future?*

McLaren (2005) explains that the commercialisation of higher education has led to the re-creation of knowledge that is responsive to both markets and capital. Knowledge in this form is re-configured as intellectual capital, a commodity for profit. Governments, seeking to link universities directly to employment outcomes, have supported universities being encouraged or coerced into accommodating the

commodification and marketisation of knowledge. Not only has this manufactured a new commercial design for universities, it has also blunted efforts to develop critical knowledge bases and independent disciplines within higher education. For Linda, this has meant that:

> *Australian universities are not taking on an intellectual mantle. They are not being proactive. They are not developing sensitive courses. They are simply responding to where government funding has directed them. Because they can't form their own agenda, they are following a government agenda toward anti-education.*

The political ramifications for social work have been apparent in its loss of power over curricula, pedagogical processes, and academic debates. Social work has been pressured and isolated by its location with an assortment of disciplines. The motivation for re-location has often been based on commercial principles. Consequently, these re-locations often have less to do with specific disciplinary alignments than with accommodating university objectives. Jane interprets the situation of Australian social work within universities like this:

> *Where do we have power? Where do we have our own budgets? We're the Department of Social Work. We're stuck in all sorts of different disciplinary things, and the reason they keep us is that students still want to do social work.*

The changed position of universities has not only had an impact on the functional aspects of operations, but has changed their once relatively independent space within civil society. This has provided a diverse range of knowledge and critique, and the opportunity for public discussion of issues. Accessing public space has been made more difficult by the curtailment and constrictions placed on staff who seek to comment publicly. According to William, these difficulties in the context of Australian social work within universities have meant that:

> *the emphasis of most social work staff is about surviving. How do you make sure that you survive, that you make sure that you publish, make sure that you manage your teaching load? So I think there is very little critical analysis of social work education. No-one's writing seriously about social work education; what we are doing, and what should we be doing.*

The engagement in public debate and discussion has been framed under neoliberal hegemony to assure market institutions in both the global and domestic contexts. Hall (2011) argues that under neoliberal hegemony, the state acts in a negative capacity to intervene in society to protect the market. Neoliberalism does not seek to build and maintain a consensus,

but rather uses social processes to develop and maintain consent within a 'thin' hegemony. Neoliberal consent provides only a superficial mechanism for maintaining hegemony that relies upon co-option, coercion, and the manufacturing of crises to maintain the individual's alignment. The consequence of this process has been rather more significant than just paying lip-service to individuals, but has altered relationships within civil society. Consent has been maintained under neoliberalism by elevating particular institutions, and by reducing or silencing others (McLaren 2005).

Within the context of the neoliberal state, civil society performs a key function, acting to maintain the dominant hegemony and to cement consent. This reveals marked changes for social work in the public realm, and in public policy processes. For social work, civil society has become a more difficult context. Neoliberalism has shifted the basis of social relations from collective concerns and a consensus about social goals, to mechanisms of individual pathologising and regulation.

The consequence for social work has been to be crowded out of the public space. Under neoliberal hegemony, social work ideas have come to be seen as antiquated and self-serving, and its policy processes counter-productive to the market and strident individualism. Where once social work commanded legitimacy and recognition within civil society, under the imprimatur of the state, it now lacks opportunity and support for many of its ideas. The imprimatur of a somewhat benign state for much of social work's history meant that its legitimacy was at least partially assured, and that its position within policy processes and civil society was accepted.

The presence of social work within civil society is something Linda recognises as important. Identifying the necessity of maintaining a public space, she describes the danger for a profession like social work if it is not challenging ideas and publicly recognisable:

> *If Australian social work isn't in the public space, then social workers are left to their own devices, and although peak bodies don't have lobbying power, and have had the ground taken out from under them, it remains an important space for social work.*

The opportunity for Australian social work and social work education in the public realm has become more limited as neoliberal hegemony strives to centralise policy processes to the market and construct corporate identities. Opportunity in the public space has been restricted, both by the redefining of actors in the space, and by processes that deter individuals and groups within social work from active debate and discussion. The

reconfiguring of Australian social work as a set of commodified skills and processes has worked to drawn attention away from opportunities for broader public discourse. The diffusion of social work's public message has been driven by neoliberal hegemonic processes of creating 'common sense' social policy understandings, where individuals are responsible, and management and marketing are seen as panaceas for human concerns. Australian social work has, in some ways, contributed to this circumstance and limited its political identity through its acceptance of neoliberal practices and processes, and by not having secured a sophisticated place in the public realm.

CONCLUSION

Australian social work's response to neoliberalism has often been diffuse and uncoordinated, and while it has sought to reflect the concerns of practitioners and clients, it has accommodated neoliberal practices and ideas through acceptance, co-option, and often by accident. Neoliberal practices and ideas that have appeared benign have been accommodated, but these have often contained hidden elements that have altered its ways of operating and thinking, weakening social work ideals. At times, social work has accommodated neoliberalism through its own naivety and lack of a sophisticated critique, and has been drawn into acceptance of neoliberal conceptions of the individual and of methods of accountability that conflict with its history and ideals. The lack of power of social workers within organisations and policy processes has allowed the advancement of arguments by managerialists about increased efficiency and better use of resources to be advanced. Social work educators highlight how neoliberal hegemony has brought the challenge of the ideological position of social work across a range of fronts.

This chapter has explored the way in which Australian social work has accommodated neoliberal ideas and practices, drawing on the experiences of social work educators, and through a reading of the social work academic literature. This chapter has sought to show that the accommodation of neoliberalism by social work is wide-ranging, from issues of day-to-day practice to its industrial position, identity, practices, and beliefs. Social work, it has been argued, has at times been ill-prepared to respond to the challenges of neoliberalism, both through its historical positioning within the state, and through its inability to respond effectively, to refute neoliberal claims. The ideological conflict created by

neoliberalism has placed social work in the position of having to accept many unpalatable things.

There is evidence in the experiences of social work educators that Australian social work has had to accommodate significant change, both in the nature of its work, in its methods of working, and in its ideas and professional standing. Consumerist neoliberal models have led to the individualisation of social work relationships, placing strain on social work beliefs, and have nullified some of its practices. Neoliberal processes have also sought to provide inducements to conscript social work to a new consumerist professional project. These duplicitous efforts of neoliberalism, have, by their very nature and hidden mechanisms, been difficult to circumvent or resist.

There has been significant discussion in this chapter of the challenges to the professional identity of social work that have occurred through the neoliberal processes of de-professionalisation and proletarianisation. The debates that have arisen highlight not only the direct effects of neoliberalism, but also the degree of compromise and complicity by social work as a profession. These compromises reflect the lack of a political agenda, and perhaps a naïve compliance on the part of social work through a preparedness to codify and sacrifice its values. How social work fits in a neoliberal state is open to question. What has been shown, here, is that its relationship with the state has been made more tenuous, and its place within civil society more confused.

This chapter argued that neoliberalism is limited as an ideology, constrained by its constant efforts to re-secure its project, and dependent upon maintaining the consent of individuals to whose interests it shows little regard. It lacks a universality and clear philosophical conception, but forms a dominant ideology through a set of parasitic and promiscuous processes. There remains, however, an amalgam of constraints, fissures and gaps within its project. Australian social work's identity might be seen as having been hampered by its lack of professional status and expertise, but its diverse locations, job variability, and the difficulty of replicating it as a set of technocratic skills, have perhaps made it less attractive to some degree, and more difficult to co-opt. The evidence in this chapter can be seen to demonstrate Australian social work's engagement in a kind of semi-compliance, but also reveals that its ideas and practices still have currency and remain somewhat uncontrolled. This may offer space for Australian social work to change, and to find itself with opportunities to modify or reject neoliberal practices.

CHAPTER 8
SOCIAL WORK'S RESISTANCE TO, AND DISRUPTION OF, NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

> *The world becomes more uncertain, and the moral panic that ensues suggests that we need to create certainty, that we need to get techniques and science and be more efficient and measurable so we can be replicable. These develop a false sense of safety through which discourses are privilege. It becomes the way knowledge is understood and validated* (Wendy).

Social work continues to walk a complex and difficult path within neoliberal hegemony, where its ideas and practices have been discredited or manipulated, and its position within the state and civil society eroded. The previous chapter depicted social work's response to neoliberalism, and its accommodation of neoliberal ideas and practices, either through necessity, naivety, or coercion. The profession has been challenged by the dramatically different assumptions of neoliberalism, and confounded by its often-chaotic managerial processes. This has left social work confused about its position, identity and role within society. It has also had a disheartening and disempowering effect, and rendered social work's responses to neoliberalism frequently uncoordinated and unconvincing.

While there is a sense of omnipresent foreboding about neoliberal hegemony, this chapter turns to ways in which social work has sought to resist and disrupt neoliberalism, and to identifying the possibilities for change that remain underexplored within Australian social work.

One of the most evident impacts of neoliberalism on social work has been through new relations of production, where the economisation of work has had a significant effect on social work's ideas, identity, and relationships. The economising of social relations, and consequently citizenship, under neoliberalism, has direct effects for social work's relationships with individuals and communities.

This chapter, while highlighting the fundamental challenge to post-war conceptions of the role of the state and civil society, exposes some of the opportunities for resistance, and disruptive ideas and practices. While much of the focus of research has been on the dominant nature of neoliberal ideas and practices, the internal weaknesses of the neoliberal hegemony provide tangible opportunities for resistance and disruption through social work's critical

ideas. Social work's disciplinary knowledge, spatial diversity, and historical position within the civil society and higher education provide a context in which to challenge neoliberal ideas and processes.

Neoliberal dominance has been created by cultural and political processes of distraction and disruption, and by mechanisms of co-option, coercion, and constraint. The manner by which neoliberalism creates its dominance provides a useful way of examining both its hegemony, and the ways in which critical responses might develop. As a project often ruled by crisis, neoliberalism consistently uses disruption and adaption to maintain its hegemony, capturing and diverting critical ideas and disrupting processes and mechanisms to foil attempts to challenge its orthodoxy. The themes of analysis developed in this thesis – accommodation, resistance, and disruption – not only indicate the way in which neoliberal hegemony might be understood as a set of ideas and practices, but also offer a useful way of understanding how social work has, and might, respond.

RESISTANCE AND DISRUPTION

Mayo (2015) argues that the methods of neoliberal disruption and crisis are the inherent methodology of contemporary capitalism, and are a method of maintaining its dominance. It is argued in this thesis that, while conventional institutional processes of dominance are still in evidence, neoliberalism has acted determinedly by enhancing cultural crises and disrupting counter-hegemonic forces. Disruption and resistance work as ways of dislodging or confronting ideas, by seeking to make a nonsense of accepted ideas, and to create distractive and diffusive processes. These disruptive forces, however, can also act in ways that create possibilities for social change, and for challenging neoliberal hegemony.

According to Cahill (2011), neoliberalism has always been contested, but resistance has never led to significant challenges to its fundamental dominance – and has, at times, seen damaging defeats for progressive forces. The disruptive processes within neoliberalism have the specific intention of making resistance difficult, either through countering ideas, subverting opportunities, or alienating possibilities through distraction. These processes of disruption and resistance occur in multi-faceted, interactive forms.

Neoliberal hegemony acts as a powerful, corrosive and disruptive process, according to Giroux (2015), but may also act as a mechanism for change. Fraser (1995) makes the distinction between affirmative and transformative politics, and warns that while disruption

may be productive, it may also simply represent a cementing of the orthodoxy, and requires more fundamental counter-hegemonic processes. Resisting and challenging, in Zizak's (2007) view, contains a paradox, for while change is sought, it can simply lead to the reinforcement and elevation of the dominant ideology. In the social work context, Carey and Foster (2011, p. 582) highlight that 'even forms of quasi-collective […] get quickly institutionalised, resistance such as anti-oppressive practice add[s] to such micro-techniques of hegemonic self-governance and control'.

SOCIAL WORK'S RESISTANCE AND DISRUPTION TO NEOLIBERAL RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

One of the significant changes under neoliberalism is the creation of new relations of production. In the post-war period under capitalism, relations of production concentrated on the industrial processes of capital and labour. The central focus of these relations was the *division* between capital and labour, where industrial processes, moderated by the state, ensured the centrality of capital accumulation. Political and economic consensus formed around industrial battles, concessions, and compromises that secured production-based capitalism.

The change from production-based capitalism to commodity capitalism is marked by significant change to economic relationships; the way capital is accumulated, the way consensus is formed, and the way in which work, and working relationships, operate and are understood within society (Hall 2011). The consequence of these new relations of production has been to reconfigure relationships between workers and employees, individuals, and the role of the state and its organisational processes. The state, once seen as both the arbiter and protector of industrial consensus, is reconfigured within post-industrial relationships as the facilitator of capital for growth, where competitiveness, reduced impediments to capital growth, and flow were seen as essential to economic viability. These new relations of production thus become defined by new accountabilities, mechanisms of surveillance, and punitive controls (Ward 2011).

As discussed previously, for social work in Australia, as in many countries, the effect has been to alter job roles and functions, based on fundamental changes to the nature of the relationships between social workers and the state. This new post-industrial climate has had

the effect of confronting social work ideas and practices and challenging its professional identity (Harlow 2003; Harris 2003; Berg, Barry & Chandler 2013).

Within the Australian welfare sector, new managerial principles and practices have reconfigured organisations now orchestrated to reflect market ideas of efficiency and accountability. The consequence has been to challenge social work's discretionary notions of profession, and to convert it to a proceduralised, economically motivated, and disciplined set of practices that produce repeatable, mono-dimensional accounts of complex social circumstances, irrespective of location or circumstance.

According to Lauri (2016, p. 148), the most profound tools of control in post-industrial neoliberalism have been auditing and surveillance. Neoliberal systems of surveillance are 'perhaps even more efficient than the Panopticon prison envisioned by Jeremy Bentham'. Lauri (2016, p. 148) goes on to point out that these processes could be used by:

> managers or auditing authorities (and hypothetically also clients) to check worker actions retrospectively. Having the knowledge that one might be monitored at any time, will likely, at least in some, induce an effective discipline through self-control.

Responding to neoliberal industrial changes has been difficult for social work. Australian social work developed within a model of welfare processes and provisions, where the divisions between labour and capital had, historically, been moderated by state interventions. Social work, in this context, has been tied to welfarist collective notions of the public good, reflected in a not-for-profit stance, based on an altruistic model of social need and public benefit. It has existed in a moderated version of the market that has been underpinned by its relationship to the market and the state. The post-industrial relations of neoliberalism have orchestrated managerial, market conducive organisational structures that have overpowered both collective and principled not-for-profit models.

Finding responses to neoliberal organisational practices and approaches has been particularly challenging for social work, compounded by a number of factors that have worked against its ability to contend with neoliberal managerial changes. Social work in post-1980s Australia is a profession weakened by the devaluing of its knowledge and expertise, and constrained by being forced to accede to the demands of neoliberal managerialism. Sally highlights the dual challenges of powerlessness of social workers within organisations, and social work's complicity in neoliberal advancement:

> *We don't have a lot of choice at the agency level. We are often being moved to being a kind of allied health worker, with an output focus that engages with an entirely different set of professional approaches.*

Australian social work has adapted to and survived many challenges throughout its history, but these have been within a more conducive social and political context. Charles affirms the profession's historical challenges, but highlights that:

> *social work has suffered a number of shocks over its life, but they were underpinned, at least, by the idea that we were responsible for our neighbours, our fellow citizens.*

Social workers in Australia often sense a lack of power within organisations, which is compounded, in Sally's view, by social work's '*ambiguous relationship of working within the arms of the state*'. This ambiguity, Keith argues, has been exacerbated in the Australian context by social work's complicity with new professional forms:

> *The construction of an elite profession that has become removed from blue-collar workers has changed the way it is looked at. It has become a way to earn a living, a means to an end.*

Determining what could be the role of social work within the Australian post-welfare state might be considered key to understanding how the profession might respond to neoliberal social policy and practices. In Keith's view, Australian social work's relationship and identity within the state have been compromised, as it is '*out of step with contemporary post-industrial conceptions of work and the maintenance of professional boundaries*'. The failure of social work to both secure a professional position of value within the neoliberal state, and to fully recognise the changes wrought by new neoliberal relations of production, has left it little space, Keith argues, for it to manoeuvre. The new post-industrial relations of production under neoliberalism have broad implications for social work's mission and professional project.

The contentiousness of the role and function of social work has, in Baines (2010) account of the situation in Canada and Australia, resulted, for many social workers, in a sense of alienation, disenchantment, and frustration. This sense of hopelessness among social workers, Wendy says, can lead to feelings that '*there is no point in trying, be fatalistic and it's easier just to conform and capitulate'*. She goes on to explain that the potential for resistance to neoliberal ideas and practices is lost when social work '*loses its meaning and becomes simply a procedural instrument of the state, easily replicated by a set of repetitive*

procedures'. There is significant danger, says van Heugten (2011), of social work becoming over-identified with the dominant institutional structure, when there is a myopic focus on compliance and the accommodation of neoliberal practices, which draws effort away from a critical engagement in the public sphere.

Neoliberal relations of production have modified working relationships across many aspects of society, especially the way in which work is constructed. Social work education has suffered from efforts by managerial institutions to commodify its ideas and knowledge, and to proceduralise its practices. Connell (2012) highlights how commodifying processes of cost containment, economic benefit, and economic accountability have also sought to alter the processes of knowledge construction, replacing the academic pursuit of knowledge with a procedural, marketised version.

SOCIAL WORK'S RESISTANCE TO, AND DISRUPTION OF, NEOLIBERAL MANAGERIALISM

Social work's responses to neoliberal managerialism have been varied. In some cases, it has adopted neoliberal frameworks, but in others there is evidence of work to ameliorate the worst excesses of neoliberal practices. There is also evidence of direct confrontation of neoliberal ideas and ideology (Jordan 1990; Harris 1999; Findley & McCormick 2005; Baines 2006; Ferguson 2008; Harris & White 2009; Singh & Cowden 2009).

While managerial processes appear omnipresent and forbidding, the net effect has been differential, dependent on location, and mitigated by disciplinary, cultural, industrial, and historical context. Social work's disparate location as a profession, its multiple approaches to service provision, and its history of radical and critical ideas have made it more difficult to commodify. Even though neoliberal managerialism has sought to proceduralise social work, it continues to maintain some flexibility. The history and circumstance of Australian social work, in William's view, makes it somewhat different: '*Somehow social work is given permission to be a bit ratty and say this just isn't right; a sense of humanity*'.

William points out that the danger is that these very disruptive elements may also act to secure neoliberal hegemony. The manipulation of social work as a vehicle to moderate the excesses of capitalism and ameliorate public concern places the profession in a difficult position. William highlights '*neoliberalism needing social workers to make a human face for*

very brutal organisations', creating a dilemma for social workers in terms of their values and commitment.

The inherent weakness of managerialism as a set of ideas and processes, Wendy argues, is that it '*seeks to 'hollow out' and minimalise the complexity of issues; it creates a form of 'disruptive positioning''*. The reduction of complex social and cultural issues to questions of management and marketing leads to discrepancies between social work's claims to manage in the interests of individuals and the actualities of reduced services and generic proceduralised responses, not contingent upon circumstance or location. In Wendy's experience, these gaps between what is claimed and what eventuates become fertile ground for disruption and resistance. In the context of social work in Australian higher education, Wendy believes: '*There are gaps and opportunities for resistance, where administrators don't have any disciplinary knowledge about social work and position themselves as experts. Inevitably this becomes full of contradictions*'.

Picking up on Sally's earlier point about the ambiguity of working within the state in neoliberal times, Kathleen contends that the seeds of resistance are formed as part of:

> *a two-way process, where social work, in one way, is a valuable tool of neoliberalism that acts, in a sense, as a buffer with regard to those considered problematic or difficult people, but on the other hand acts as a resistance and disruption as well.*

This, she suggests, confounds simplistic consumerist understandings of social issues, and provides opportunities for social workers where '*they can insert ideas and approaches that educate and provide more complete responses to social circumstances*'.

In Lauri's (2016) view, resistance is the diagnosis of power, and an examination of the mechanisms by which hegemony is maintained. These actions occur at both broad and very localised levels. He considers a range of micro ways of resisting neoliberal managerial practices:

> It is interesting to ponder the documentation without enthusiasm, to voice protest over its meaninglessness, to use copy-paste, recycle old documents, document retrospectively, engage in critical discussions outside of the social services channels of communication (phone, chat, mail) and meet clients outside of the formal system, in secrecy (Lauri 2016, p. 148).

The effort of seeking to turn complex social issues, with long gestations and compounding factors that are notoriously difficult to resolve short term, and the

implausibility of constructing generalised, procedural solutions, leads directly to challenges to neoliberal hegemonic 'common sense'. To mask the failure of neoliberal processes, diversions, such as creating 'moral panics', or arguing the impeding of the market, or blaming individuals, have been effective in maintaining neoliberal dominance. There remain difficulties for neoliberalism in maintaining its hegemony at the practice level, however, where diversions and individual blame are ineffective.

Jennifer outlines the disruption and challenge to managerial processes that can and do occur within Australian social welfare organisational contexts, where neoliberal processes are seen to be ineffective. She explains that highlighting the discrepancies created by managerialism, and exposing them for critical comment, is one way in which workers resist and disrupt. Taking advantage of these disruptions, and developing resistances to managerialism, often requires the ability to work 'within' and 'against' the welfare system. To disrupt and resist within neoliberal organisations requires, in Gary's view, the development of a critical awareness and understanding of the possibilities for action. He describes it as: '*the art of the possible in the context, and crafting and shaping action in the space*'.

This reinforces the need for well-developed skills of critical analysis, and the ability to provide a sophisticated critique and to engage with alternatives. Charles also identifies the necessity of developing dextrous responses, as social workers, that are mindful of the pragmatics of neoliberal managerialism and offer alternatives. He concludes that, within Australian social welfare organisation, while '*the bulk of the work is within the system, it also requires, at the same time, the developing [of] the ability to be critical of it*'.

The impregnability of neoliberalism's hegemony is considered questionable, for it is an ideology fraught with contradictions. Carroll (2010, p. 12) describes it as 'a weak basis for social cohesion in the meta-narrative of market-mediated system integration', and as constantly under threat of fragmentation. Gill (1995) similarly recognises neoliberalism's vulnerability as a hegemonic form, as it relies heavily on maintaining consent through regulatory controls. Where previously a 'consensus' was sought, negotiated and secured through groups within civil society, under neoliberalism a more fragile 'consent' is based on regulatory accountability controls and coercive manipulations.

The flimsiness of neoliberal managerialist processes within Australian welfare organisation of proceduralising and simplifying social policy responses, creates possibilities

for the inversion of ideas and the development of resistant practices. Australian social workers' resistance to neoliberal managerialism has contributed to limited penetration of neoliberal ideas and practices. Zoe concludes that:

> *lip service need be paid to neoliberal work practices by social workers, but also in the space, opportunities are created, and progressive approaches, knowledge and skill can also be implanted.*

Jillian identifies other ways that Australian social work can continue its resistance to neoliberal managerialism:

> *by not applying approaches that are traditionally seen as bounded by the established perceptions of the role, these become ways of releasing practice to be more responsive to families, even within a state system that has acknowledged constraints.*

The fragmentation within neoliberal managerialism, according to Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd and Walker (2005), is in part due to its lack of a unified set of ideals, and to it creating an environment where its actions become incongruent with its objectives. The cynicism of managerialism, of treating all aspects of social relations as simple problems of management, centred on improving efficiency and increasing proceduralism through accountability and market structure, belies its much more political agenda. Workers quickly become aware of managerialism's ulterior motive. According to Jennifer, managerialism for social workers has formed as a set of '*processes used as a vehicle for gaining and regulating the consent of workers, as a form of 'procedural accountability''*.

Neoliberalism's efforts to maintain its hegemony have resulted in spiralling managerialist audit and surveillance mechanisms, which, Ward (2011) suggests, disclose a fundamental ideological tension between neoliberalism's claim to be an ideology of self-regulation, and its highly controlling and regulated set of actions in reality. Over time, this becomes unconvincing for workers, and is ultimately ideologically counter-productive. Opportunities therefore exist for social work within the tensions of the neoliberal hegemony, where social work ideas and processes act as forms of resistance, and disrupt neoliberal processes and the validity of its ideas. Singh and Cowden (2009) contend that the power to uncover, confront, and resist are essential elements of resistance within the social worker role. The antagonism and frustration born of managerialism provide the opportunity for action, but this action is constrained. Sally argues that, within Australian social work, '*resistance is an inevitability at the practice level, but it is weaker and more difficult for workers at the broader, structural level*'.

Jillian asserts that critical spaces can be achieved, however, by social workers within Australian organisations using their assumed degree of independence within their working situations: '*No-one is with the social worker when they make their assessment, and while there are accountabilities and responsibilities, they are unlikely to be absolute or totally encompassing*'.

Resisting neoliberal commodification of practices and processes is possible, though. Lesley suggests that critically aware social workers offer intellectual vision and clarity of purpose. She concludes that '*the sophisticated practitioner, in any field of practice, with a clear idea of what you are doing, and a clear idea of the organisation, has potential to create opportunity*'.

Wendy similarly observes that Australian social work has not been consumed by neoliberalism: '*Neoliberalism hasn't taken our freedoms entirely, so that if we find ways to flourish within this context, it is still possible to do good social work*'.

The result can be small acts of resistance that disturb the application and authenticity of neoliberal ideas and practices, but more is required to resist neoliberalism effectively. Leonard (1979, p. 171) has argued that, historically, 'the strengthening of collective resistance to the power of dominant cultural discourses is […] a necessary element in the struggle towards an emancipatory idea and practice of welfare'. Beyond the mechanisms of managerialism, resistance requires a political awareness of critical approaches and ideas. In Mary's view, this requires a degree of reflective analysis by Australian social work: '*The conceptualisation of social work values that have fostered radical approaches to social work practice are a key element in developing a resistance to neoliberalism*'.

Managerialism works to develop its own replicability by aggregating responses and adapting across locations. Therefore, to develop effective resistance, in Leonard's (1997, p. 171) view, requires 'the means by which some level of critical distance can be attained from cultural messages that exploit subjects, homogenise differences and induce profound dependencies on the market'. Within the Australian context, Kathleen maintains that the spatial diversity and disciplinary variability of social work have made it more difficult for neoliberalism to enforce its replicability: '*The broad reach of social work practitioners – who go everywhere and cross a variety of sectors – provides a diversity, provides a base for resistance*'.

Leonard (1997, p. 171) emphasises 'the need to develop a powerful critique that can enter more fully into public debates about needs, desires, differences, risks and harm', and while diversity and locational variability provide important opportunities for social work, they do not create change of themselves.

SOCIAL WORK IDENTITY AND NEOLIBERAL DE-PROFESSIONALISATION

By curtailing and regulating independent expertise and political authority, neoliberalism seeks to change the working role and practices of professions (Carroll 2006). It works to truncate sophisticated knowledge and to denigrate disciplinary expertise through de-professionalisation and de-skilling. It achieves this through the commodification, regulation, accountability, and routinising of skills (Dominelli 1996). Industrially, according to Lorens (2014), de-skilling and de-professionalisation produce increased workloads, commodification, and the increased casualisation of work.

Australian social work, like many professions, has been drawn into new regulatory processes which seek to constrain its disciplinary control. Neoliberalism has sought, in Gary's view, to constrain '*the contextual nature of social work and its practices, where the environment of neoliberalism defines and shapes the professional project of social work*'.

The consequence has been to undermine Australian social work's values and identity as a profession. Gary anecdotally notes that Australian social workers have responded to the threats of de-professionalisation in three ways:

> *As 'managers', those with aspirations adjust to and accommodate the new neoliberal environment, those 'desperate to escape' seek to avoid work environments under the glare of a neoliberal practice, and 'strategists' seek to work out 'how do I work now in tune with my values in this new environment that's not going to over-compromise'.*

While there is evidence of the impact of de-professionalisation on Australian social work through the deconstruction of skills and knowledge, there is also conjecture about how social work should develop and maintain its identity in this antagonistic environment. For some, accepting the reality of neoliberal hegemony is seen as an inevitability, while others warn of the perilous consequences of compliance, and suggest a more politically active and disciplinarily diverse approach to identity.

Some within the profession have called for the professional registration and the licensing of Australian social workers as a way of competing and surviving within the

neoliberal state (Healy & Lonnie 2010; Healey & Meagher 2004). In this analysis, registration and regulation are seen as forms of protection for social work's skills and identity against neoliberal de-professionalisation. Sally, for example, concurs that, in the Australian context, '*moves towards registration [are] a way to protect our name and our profession; but I'd like to see more*'.

Kathleen takes a quite different view, arguing that the codifying and regulating of Australian social work would simply accelerate its de-professionalisation. This, she argues, would lead to a dismembering of professional skills and knowledge. The result, Kathleen goes on to describe, is a working environment where social work professionals are easily replaced by semi-skilled, low-paid workers: '*Social workers are replaced by human services workers who are untrained, and their work tends to be fairly routinised, and tends to dumb down jobs*'.

The dilemma created for Australian social work within a new neoliberal professionalism is that its sophisticated professional skills and discrete disciplinary knowledge are at odds with neoliberal 'pre-figurative relationships between professional 'helper' and 'client', in which the interaction is characterised as 'subject to subject'' (Leonard 1997, p. 173). The pre-figurative politics of individualising and codifying relationships under neoliberalism has broader consequences, as Ward (2011) warns: the codification and regulation of professions, while appearing to protect professional position and identity, can make them more vulnerable to control and de-professionalisation. Jennifer argues that Australian social work's position may be enhanced by remaining outside professional regulation and codification: '*An un-codified social work makes it a slippery eel, and makes it a profession that is difficult to inhabit and control*'.

The very breadth of social work's disciplinary knowledge and complex understandings of social issues, in Jillian's analysis, makes for '*a strong Australian social work identity that makes it more resilient*'. Similarly, Gary maintains that efforts to construct a unified and discrete social work within neoliberal hegemony does not strengthen its identity. He concludes that putting '*this barrier around this thing called the professional project of social work, would be self-defeating and ineffectual*'.

The development of the political potential of social work, Linda believes, provides a clear avenue for resisting neoliberalism. She argues that the pursuit of regulation and compliance has meant forgoing opportunities to develop an Australian social work political

project that is more resistant to neoliberal advances. In her view, developing a more critical and political Australian social work project would have given its ideas strength and its workers a clear aim. According to Charles, a politically aware and responsive social work is essential to the development of a sophisticated identity. He makes the point that '*the ability to maintain the integrity of social work concepts, while not becoming part of that neoliberal project*' gives it the opportunity to encourage and support politically sophisticated notions of resistance. In his view, simply opposing neoliberal ideas and practices without a political project offers limited opportunity for real change. He describes this as '*a boutique niche of social work that is almost self-indulgent*'. In the final analysis, formulating resistance to neoliberalism and maintain Australian social work's integrity requires a more determined political project.

SOCIAL WORK RESISTING AND DISRUPTING NEOLIBERAL SOCIAL RELATIONS

The development of the neoliberal consumer has altered relationships between the individual and the state, with marked consequences for social work. Notions of the 'self-regulating individual consumer' have superseded social relations based on the idea of the 'democratic citizen'. Neoliberal individualism begets an individualised consumerist practice, which, according to Jennifer, '*rubs up against social work's structural disciplinary background of viewing issues within their social context*'.

Australian social work has been drawn into neoliberal individualism in a number of ways. In Jennifer's account, the effort of '*increasing pressure to codify roles and jobs, often with the acceptance of the AASW has provided little chance for social work to critique or evaluate the effects of neoliberalism*'.

Inducements to take up individual consumerist approaches have been one way of seducing practitioners, which have occurred, according to Jillian, by the linking of individual consumerist approaches to social work's professional project. Opportunities for a re-professionalised profession, based on quantification and medicalised approaches, offer recognition and neoliberal legitimation. This circumstance, Lesley concludes, has arisen in part because social work has not been '*strong minded [enough] to resist the flattery to their professional egos*'. Jillian offers an example of how these inducements were designed to flatter social workers with elevated job titles: '*I would hear social workers calling themselves*

forensic social workers, searching for a more sophisticated profession where managerialism and professionalism were running along in parallel'.

Others argue that social work has not been diligent in examining the conflicting interpretations of the individual offered by neoliberal consumerism and social work's own democratic and collectivist accounts. In the end, Lesley concludes that Australian social work has '*let this happen, where social workers have not been intellectually strong enough in their analysis*'.

While neoliberal individualism's impact on social work has raised concerns, Kathleen argues that '*the implementation and acceptance of consumerist models of social relations in social work remains limited in many contexts*'. In part, this limited incursion can be attributed, in Ryan's view, to the tenacity of social work values and assumptions about the human condition, which make it difficult for social work to fully countenance neoliberal ideas of social relations: '*for Australian social work programs to really take on board a neoliberal understanding, they would have to talk themselves into something that is totally un-social work*'.

Gary argues that for Australian social work to forgo its fundamental structural conceptions of oppression and disadvantage, it would require '*a particular narrowing [of] social work's vision*'. Social work's identity and values have historically been closely linked to its contextual analysis, and, in Jordan's (1990) view, its values have historically provided a form of resistance by at least bearing witness to injustice and refusing to cooperate with processes which disadvantage service users. Michael points out that maintaining a critical voice in Australian social work is important because these '*oppositional forces within social work's discipline, discourses and practices undermine the values and principles of neoliberalism*'.

To develop meaningful social work relationships that have the strength to resist neoliberal individualism, requires, in Michael's view, a '*subtlety, to persuade or dissuade, to modify to take the edges off rather than to resist neoliberalism directly*'.

The opportunity for Australian social work to act to resist neoliberal processes and ideas is contingent, in Keith's view, upon it having a strong moral identity and convictions:

> *Social work has to be mindful of its moral compass, and to guard that very carefully. To me, it is important in defining what social work is, and determining those things we should sign up to and those that we should find ways of resisting.*

Keith feels that, while the demise of the Australian welfare state has been predicted for decades, it still maintains a prominence that is resistant to neoliberal forces: '*Despite the constant, ongoing and relentless attacks, it's still standing, it's been beaten and bruised, but it's still there. There is a resilience to the welfare state*'.

The welfare state in Australia, even after 40 years of efforts to dismantle it by neoliberalism, remains wedded to elements of broader social policy, such as Medicare and aged pensions, that reflect collectivist community expectations.

SOCIAL WORK'S USE OF PEDAGOGY AND KNOWLEDGE TO RESIST AND DISRUPT NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY

Historically, the identity of social work has been closely tied to its publicly valued knowledge and expertise, which have acted as sources of its professional legitimation. Neoliberalism replaces disciplinary knowledge and intellectual endeavour with managerial routinisation and the 'common sense' of informationalism. For social work, this has devalued its knowledge, stifled public debate, and reduced opportunities to advance its ideas. The relentless de-intellectualising of neoliberalism, in Lesley's view, has entrapped both social workers and clients within Australian services. She contends that, for workers, '*it doesn't matter how much you critique it*', it remains strong, and creates at '*every level of existence a contradiction in both resisting and complying*' as '*you continue to prosper and your wages still go up*'.

Knowledge production, according to Wendy, has been key to neoliberal processes. She identifies the way in which knowledge processes, within both Australian universities and welfare organisations, have been changed: '*managerial knowledge […] attempts to construct processes of trying to measure the immeasurable, so that in the end knowledge becomes about technique, calculability, measurability*'.

Neoliberal knowledge processes reduce complex social issues to formulaic routinisation. and use reconfigured language as a mechanism, either through confusing established meanings, or by repurpose ideas with new meanings. In this regard, Linda cites that Australian social work '*language, once considered to be 'owned' by social work and progressive social movements, has been changed*'.

Words such as 'community', 'citizenship' and 'participation', in Linda's analysis, have often taken on quite different and opposing meanings under neoliberal hegemony, and

this makes it difficult for social work to express its ideas and concerns, and to advocate within the broad community. In Charles' view, the reuse of language has made it difficult to maintain the integrity of social work knowledge: 'W*hile it remains possible, […] avoiding becoming part of that neoliberal project is exceedingly hard work*'.

Pedagogical and knowledge processes within Australian higher education that encourage and support intellectual integrity have also come under direct pressure. Within Australian social work education, according to Linda:

> *there are tremendous changes, away from a semi-autonomous focus on scholarship and discipline, specific knowledge and the autonomy of the academy, to a very controlled, competency-based economic framework with stringent limits on academics in terms of recognition, prestige, autonomy, respect.*

Neoliberal knowledge processes, in Cowen and Singh's (2009, p. 487) view, have sought specifically to undermine academic and pedagogical knowledge and ideas. What Giroux (2015, p. 2) deems to be critical in resisting the pedagogical reductionism of neoliberalism is not only ensuring the 'meaning and purpose of higher education, but also civil society, politics and the fate of democracy itself'. He further suggests that a key role of education is to act as an inquisitive and critical voice, and to a have position and influence in the public realm. Without this, public discourse and processes of 'democratic agency, action and change' (Giroux 2015, p. 5) are muted, and citizen involvement is stifled.

Marginson (2011), writing in the Australian context, argues that knowledge processes within higher education under neoliberalism simply foster higher 'economic productivity', resulting in increasing demands, fragmentation of delivery, and the isolation of workers from knowledge processes. Within the neoliberal conception of higher education, the student is reconstructed as a consumer in a relationship that is based on an economic contract of provision. In Linda's experience, neoliberal knowledge production within Australian social work education results in '*denigration of the teacher–student relationship, and removal of teaching and learning as a social goal*'. According to Charles, in following a neoliberal path, universities have oppressed social work and its knowledge production:

> *Most of the resistance in Australian social work programs has been beaten out of us, and universities have made life difficult for social work staff through a regimen of publishing and managing your teaching load. So there is very little opportunity for critical analysis of social work education, leaving educators feeling intellectually battered and bruised.*

In his analysis, there is significant pressure within Australian social work programs in higher education to comply. For some educators, this has meant accepting a corporate approach as a way of dealing with the tension between the market-oriented university and the social work profession. Michael explains that the dilemma for social workers is that educators retain a concern about students' ability to work in organisations, but also wish to focus on critiquing neoliberal processes. As he puts it: '*We have a responsibility to give our students the ability to work in organisations that look like corporations*'.

Other educators hold quite a different view, and emphasise the need to give students critical analysis skills and methods of action to evaluate policy and to develop programmatic responses in situ. Without students developing critical abilities, they are at the mercy of neoliberal processes. Critical pedagogy, in Fisher's (2009, citied in Giroux 2015, p. 1) view: 'should be disruptive and unsettling and push hard against the common sense vocabularies of neoliberalism and its regime of affective management'.

Charles identifies the need to develop both critical abilities, and forms of resistance to those things that increase inequality. An understanding of the importance of ethics and ethical considerations has a profound effect, in Charles' view, on the way social workers see and construct the world:

> *Ethical considerations are not just as a set of ideas that you apply in a particular way, but as ideas [for social workers] to ask the critical questions and to think reflectively about their own practice, and the context in which they are practising.*

He goes on to describe how developing critical abilities provides a way of working to challenge neoliberal practices and resist actions that increase inequality:

> *Critical abilities allow us to understand that sometimes the values and ideals that you hold may well be compromised by the context you are in, and how you hold onto those values becomes the key question. It doesn't mean your values are wrong, just that the context needs to be challenged in some way.*

This approach underscores the importance of a critical model of education and analysis in providing a benefit to the student as potential social worker. It also provides value to social work as a collective political and social project.

THE POLITICAL PROJECT OF SOCIAL WORK, AND ITS RESISTANCE TO, AND DISRUPTION OF, NEOLIBERALISM

There is a recognition of the broader political nature of pedagogical and knowledge processes, and of the possibility of identifying critical opportunities to resist and disrupt neoliberal knowledge processes. Lesley understands the tactical nature of responding in the political context of Australian higher education. She describes the importance of developing a political astuteness by '*encouraging universities' commitment to social work programs, even if that commitment is coming from a naïve place*'. In so doing, she offers a thoughtful approach to the issues of resisting neoliberalism, arguing for sophisticated and imaginative ideas for working within and challenging its frameworks. Lesley suggests a need to be mindful that working within its hegemony '*rather than [through] direct acts of resistance can be fruitful*'. This reflects, in her view, the realpolitik of dealing with neoliberal knowledge and pedagogical processes within Australian higher education:

> *Social work's ambiguous position of being seen as a vocational program, albeit not prestigious in intellectual and research terms, but one that fulfils universities' desire for its professionally accredited imprimatur and respect, and can be utilised as a means of crafting a critical space.*

Charles argues that political opportunities exist within higher education as a result of Australian social work's historical location:

> *It has been located on universities for such a long time, and this gives it a powerful discourse, but at the same time its survival is more dependent on its teaching people something with vocational outcomes.*

The politics of developing an 'everyday resistance' as social work educators requires, in Ryan's view, a pragmatic approach with '*a need on the surface to appear more efficient, because the whole context of universities has become more neoliberal*'. While an understanding of the day-to-day politics of resistance is considered necessary, Lesley argues that sustained pedagogical disruption of neoliberalism requires the development of a critical structural awareness that can both critique the policy processes of Australian universities, and operate as a mode of action. She emphasises the need to '*understand the structural circumstances of people's lives, and their institutional context*'. In the context of the student population, Charles agrees that the development of critical understandings is important '*to prepare students to be able to work within a system, and to survive while still maintaining the ability to keep their moral compass*'.

This can be achieved by developing students' critical faculties around knowledge, and their awareness of the importance of contextual situations. Zoe explains how this can be achieved in the university teaching context '*by developing the critical abilities of students and working with them to recognise key characteristics of neoliberalism and its shifting shape, and by developing critical understanding through workshop scenarios*'.

Developing and maintaining critical knowledge within social work education within Australian universities requires, in Linda's view, the development of an acute political awareness on the part of both staff and students. As she says: '*This can be aided by developing curricula that respond to the changing political climate and the changing profession*'.

Social work's history of critical thought provides a pillar for a sustained critical pedagogy. Jennifer identifies that, within the Australian context, '*academic writers like Jim Ife and Bob Pease continue to maintain a radical social justice orientation, which gives Australian social work a critical strength*'.

The development of critical knowledge that is effective in challenging neoliberalism and bringing about real change, rather than merely upsetting neoliberalism, requires critical knowledge to be transformative and to create penetrating resistance (Fraser 1995). Wendy similarly highlights that pedagogical resistance requires the development of more than simple disruptive tactics. It requires, in her view, '*transformative learning and critical consciousness, aimed at giving students the power of learning as skills for the workplace*'.

Knowledge becomes transformative, in Lesley's view, when it infiltrates the values of the individual. She finds that this occurs when '*students examine their own values and raise questions about ways of knowing, and question received wisdom*'. The embeddedness of everyday neoliberal ideas and language makes the development of transformative learning challenging. In the context of the Australian university, in Wendy's analysis, creating transformative space is difficult because of:

> *The crowded nature of the curriculum with increasing competency-based stuff, and constant challenges by students, management, and community. The 'easily ingested' nature of neoliberal ideas provides a continuing political challenge to critical knowledge.*

The challenges to the development of critical pedagogy are not only structural but also ideological, with social work education being constantly confronted by neoliberal

'common sense'. This occurs, according to Zoe, through processes of disruption and distortion: '*Ideas such as 'the individual' and 'independent' become distorted, and if we don't recognise the distorted form, we can easily reinforce these notions*'.

The constant adaptability of neoliberal knowledge, Kathleen says, makes it very difficult to develop transformative learning opportunities within social work education: '*Neoliberal ideas are enshrined in our everyday lives, be they for social workers or anyone else. It requires a constant battle to avoid being remade as neoliberal consumer citizen*'.

While difficulty in resisting and disrupting neoliberal knowledge processes can occur in all kinds of ways, according to Kathleen, sometimes '*it takes the form of developing counter narratives of hope, and developing a battle of ideas as a public alternative*'. Zoe believes that resistance entails more than just the development of skills and analysis, but also a moral conviction: '*It is necessary to develop hope about the possibilities of social change and social justice and how we can work together to create an optimism for change*'.

Contextual elements play a significant role in resisting neoliberal knowledge by developing spaces that build knowledge, ideas and actions, and allow debate and critique. In Charles' view, Australian social work ideals have not been '*broken'*, even after decades of contestation, and that social work retains a '*moral compass*'. He cites this notion of a moral compass '*as the key to working effectively in confronting situations. Being able to maintain your armour can be achieved by challenging the policies in the right way at the right time*'.

Social work has also been able to maintain critical spaces within neoliberalism, according to Jennifer, where the profession has held onto broad structural and critical elements: '*Some of social work's elements still fall outside a neoliberal agenda, and provide the luxury, at times, of being able to maintain a space that many other disciplines cannot*'.

Some of these critical spaces of social work derive from its historically developed frameworks and documented approaches. Central to the maintenance of a critical space, Wendy contends, is Australian social work's ability to reflect on and value its history: '*Social work should not relinquish the documented structural and politically reflective analyses that have been the result of hard-fought past actions*'.

Critical pedagogical ideas have also faced danger in another way, according to Wendy, in whose university they have been used as a marketing and branding tool to differentiate their curriculum: '*Critical pedagogical approaches have become drawn into the drive to maintain students, and to compromise standards*'.

In this way, the commodification of teaching and learning, and the corporatisation of universities have created an urgency for market-based processes and outcomes that remain hungry for marketising opportunities, and for the re-packaging of complex ideas as products.

SOCIAL WORK'S RESISTANCE AND DISRUPTION WITHIN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

To be effective in resisting and disrupting neoliberalism, according to Cahill (2011, p. 489), requires more than simply defensive strategies, as some of the alternatives to neoliberalism 'have been legitimated' by neoliberal processes and practices. A critical approach has been pivotal, in Cahill's view, in identifying and highlighting 'some of the socially destructive tendencies of neoliberalism'.

Central to maintaining spaces to disrupt neoliberalism is the development of intellectual activity within the public realm. Giroux (2004) points out that pedagogy is not separate from public life and discourse, and that there is a moral requirement for intellectual moral activity to be located in the public discourse. Neoliberal hegemony has been effective in cramping the space for intellectual alternatives, and in stifling intellectual ideas through its simplistic orthodoxies. While intellectual activity in the public sphere crosses many disciplines, Singh and Cowden (2009) argue that disrupting neoliberalism requires the particular effort of social workers to see themselves as intellectuals. Neoliberal hegemony promulgates an anti-intellectualism that seeks to stifle debate by reducing public opportunity for discussion, and by denigrating disciplinary knowledge as elitist and removed from the real world.

Social work intersects with civil society in multiple ways; in the everyday milieu of life, in the activities of organisations, and in voicing issues in the public sphere. As Carroll (2006) describes, efforts to disrupt neoliberal 'common sense' require the development of intellectual processes that act to counter accepted ideas. Civil society is the public space where ideology is reinforced, legitimised and enlivened, according to Carroll (2006), and ideology is reinforced and maintained by 'experts' reflecting the ideas of the dominant hegemony within the public realm.

Social work has held a critical historical position within the public sphere, but the neoliberal reconfiguring of civil society has changed the public nature of the space, which, for social work, has reduced opportunities for public debate, and for the canvassing of critical

ideas. Not only has the public space been constricted by a number of factors, but so, too, has social work's position within it. Harrington and Beddoe (2014) state that social work has become more embedded in the state apparatus, which, while it has brought some gains, has also created an increasing ambiguity about social work's core purpose. The focus on developing social work's identity as a professional project has correspondingly diminished its role within civil society. As Keith reflects: '*Since the 1970s, social work bought into the professional project, and became so committed to being professional that it lost sight of its political welfare agenda*'.

He goes on to say that, while '*it works the closest with poor people of any [of the] professions, it doesn't voice their [poor people's] concerns publicly; it's fairly silent*'.

Fraser (1995) argues that the elevation of cultural recognition and social equality processes in the public space, which are collective and transformative, is necessary to challenge neoliberal hegemony. Linda concurs:

> *What is necessary is a resurgence of politics back into social work analysis, focusing on the issues of capital, gender, ethnicity, and language as factors that determine advantage and disadvantage in the cultural space.*

Examining the position of Australian social work in the public space requires a sophisticated political analysis of neoliberalism, according to Wendy. She goes on to identify the necessity of recognising the ways in which neoliberalism has thrived on processes of co-option by using social work within its project: '*Neoliberalism relies on social work taking it on, but resistance possibilities exist, only not taking it on in the way it envisages*'.

Others similarly suggest the need for social work to develop a more sophisticated political analysis of neoliberalism. In Linda's view, a far more extreme response is needed: '*The excesses and inhumane treatment of so many people across the globe, and neoliberalism's interference in national politics, requires a revolution as the only way forward to resist neoliberalism*'.

According to Keith, the starting point for the development of a clear political agenda is for social work to move beyond its often-muted political response. Social work, say Keith, needs a clear position in the Australian public realm:

> *It needs a political agenda that acts to defend the welfare state, but it lacks a discourse to match the economism of neoliberalism. The result is [that] it has been neutered by*

its inability to formulate an agenda and has shied away from occupying the public space.

Linda sees evidence of a resurgence of critical analysis by social work in the public space: '*The rise in feminist analysis, and the seeking of a space for issues around family violence, misogyny in the workplace and the treatment of women leaders is encouraging*'.

One of the possible reasons for social work's general reluctance to claim the public space is the inherent tension between social work's role of working within the state and at the same time having a desire to be a public critic on behalf of its clientele (Karger & Hernandez 2015). The role of the social worker as a public intellectual is made more problematic by the conflict between its desire to represent client interests and to maintain its working relationships within organisations. Most organisations, according to Karger and Hernandez (2015), rarely encourage or take kindly to exposure to issues in the public space by staff acting independently. This, in the organisations' eyes, exposes them to controversy which they don't welcome and can ill afford in a 'market-based' environment.

In the past there has been greater encouragement of workers and organisations to be involved in public debates about social issues. Under neoliberal hegemony, activity in the public space is seen as contradicting the fundamentalism of the market, and as creating conflicting discourses. This constraint is often reflected in the way in which governments and instrumentalities enforce confidentiality clauses, and take punitive steps to nullify public critics. Sally makes the point that it is often against a person's best interest to be critical in the public realm: '*Acting in the public sphere in the current climate, you have to be willing to risk losing your job and risk the agency*'.

Social work has always held an important historical position in the public sphere through its involvement in issues of social justice and the challenging of inequality. Keith reaffirms Australian social work's long commitment to these ideas: '*Social justice has always held sway as a secular way of describing compassion or charity within social work*'.

He goes on to outline that, while other disciplines have become more prominent within civil society, social work has become less visible in recent years. Other disciplines have made strong critical comment, participated in academic critique, and have taken community action in civil society in areas as diverse as economics, human geography, and education.

SOCIAL WORKERS AS PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS AND THE OPPORTUNITY FOR CRITICAL RESISTANCE

The public sphere has formed a central mediating aspect of capitalist society since the 18th Century (Habermas 1989), and has acted as a mediator between the private concerns of individuals and the demands of the state. During this period, the development of a bourgeois public realm provided the possibility of orchestrating public opinion 'that opposed state power and the powerful interests that were coming to shape bourgeois society' (Kellner 2014, p. 20).

The public sphere grew to encompass diverse elements, and became a place where individuals could express their needs and interests, and have influence upon the state and political processes. Kellner (2014, p. 3) writes that it provided the basis for a negotiated social consensus that drew from the:

> organs of information and political debate such as newspapers and journals, as well as institutions of political discussion such as parliaments, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs and coffee houses, meeting halls, and other public spaces where socio-political discussion took place.

As Gounari (2006, p. 79) puts it, what has occurred is a 'crisis of critique' within the public sphere, where 'appropriation and redefinition' by the capitalist market ideology of concepts such as 'freedom', 'democracy', and 'community', among others, has produced a powerful myth about itself that does not need to be interrogated. This has led to a failure to critique, and to have avenues available by which to critique neoliberal ideology. According to Wendy, this neoliberal myth-making has sought to hollow out and suffocate social work's vision, and to preclude it from meaningful discourse in the public realm: '*It has destroyed the heart and soul of social work, and has transformed social work into something else, something that's quite irrelevant, quite visionless*'. This suffocation by neoliberalism has sought to 'transcend history in that it has attempted to bring closure to the most pressing questions of our times' (Gounari 2006, p. 78).

Historically, one of the voices prominent within the public sphere has been the public intellectual, those with the opportunity and expertise to speak out on contentious issues and establish debates on topics in the public interest. This kind of public debate and policy formation within civil society came to represent the accepted method by which social agreement was developed and maintained. Neoliberalism has altered the public space in ways

that make it difficult to raise issues in civil society, either through reduced opportunity, or through reconstructing the public space to have little influence on public policy.

One of the distinct ways for social work to debate issues of public policy or social concerns has been within civil society, through organisations and individuals. Social work has historically been part of the public space, and has sought to represent the interests of those without a public voice. The role of the social worker as public intellectual has numerous forms, commonly appearing through academic institutions, activist groups, or advocacy organisations. These have played a critical role in raising concerns or ensuring that issues that affect groups of individuals are considered in a broader context.

The development of a critical intellectual voice to build a counter-hegemony to the neoliberal hegemony within civil society requires both opportunity and activism. Social work needs to act, according to Keith, as an active advocate of ideas in the public sphere, most notably in the role of public intellectual: '*Social work can act as the public intellectual to resist neoliberal ideas, much in the same way conservatives have done very effectively*'.

But it is challenging to act in the public space; as Sally describes, it requires both strong political conviction and collective effort: '*You have to have a very strong value base to resist, and while individuals are limited, it is through collective activity that social work can really respond*'.

The suffocation of the public intellectual has occurred within institutions that have traditionally been the stalwarts of public critique. Keith recognises that:

> *It has happened in academia through disincentives to engage in the public space, and as a profession, in an agency, they muscle you out; it is a catch 22 situation.*

To develop a resistant value base, Giroux (2004) asserts, there is a need to understand how cultural processes act as public pedagogy. Resisting requires a moral and political practice that makes visible the power relations of neoliberalism, and makes it accountable. Developing collective resistances, Jennifer relates, can occur:

> *When staff […] have a clear understanding about neoliberalism and its impact on the social work practice sector and the university sector, and how we want to do things differently. I think we are very clear that we are resisting and not becoming enmeshed in it.*

While localism and contextual accounts of resistance to neoliberal hegemony provide some opportunities for disrupting neoliberal hegemony, effective resistance requires more

than localised acts; it necessitates global and collective action. The development of broader alignments with other groups perhaps provides a more powerful momentum. Jane claims that there is a need for a '*broadening of social work's political notions to encompass the social and ecological notion of justice*', and, in so doing, to develop a more effective position within civil society. Harris (1999) concurs that social work needs to tie its identity to the development of new alliances with broader groups of citizens, learning from citizens, and working within and against the neoliberal market. The problem of building alliances is not limited to external relationships, but signifies, according to Linda, a failure to develop strong relationships with disadvantaged individuals and '*effective alignments with service users and their organisations*'.

This represents something of a dilemma for social work, in Linda's view, for as it tries to develop its contemporary professional identity, this appears to contradict efforts to build alliances with those most at risk under neoliberalism. This problem of the conflicted relationship between social work and disadvantaged citizens leads, according to Keith, to the essential question of whom social work represents.

Without a clear political project aligned to those disenfranchised under neoliberal hegemony, the danger for social work is that resistance becomes valueless. Accordingly, Mary suggests that '*while it makes you feel good to have resisted, it doesn't necessarily change anything*'. This may lead to unexpected consequences, reinvigorating neoliberal hegemony and enshrining the very things social work seeks to change. She is concerned that social workers can be caught up in the vanity of defining themselves as radicals: '*While opposition is appropriate, you have to have more in your repertoire than that if you want to bring about change*'.

Kathleen similarly describes the difficulties of resistance for social workers when they have been remade as neoliberal citizens:

> *It is significantly more challenging. Although we still resist in all kinds of ways, sometimes the forms of resistance take the form of counter-narratives that act to keep hope alive as a public alternative. So we are involved in the neoliberal project, but involved intensely in a battle of ideas.*

The development of resistance to neoliberal hegemony through the creation of new alliances that broaden social work's focus offers, in Gary's view, the opportunity to develop an imaginative social work identity, and a project with cross-disciplinary connections. He

identifies this as a new way of building political capacity and a new social work identity. Developing a response to the ambiguity and uncertainty of social work's position by engaging in a cross-disciplinary approach within the public sphere. This, Gary argues, will reveal new approaches, ideas and issues that are able to register community concern, and will act to revitalise social work's public role by giving it an identity beyond neoliberal professionalism.

The potential of developing collective responses is hampered, to some degree, by groups already created under neoliberalism to protect their own position. The individualisation and commodification of society has made collective actions more difficult. Linda describes the difficulty of developing collective solidarity under neoliberalism:

> *There is an opposition to protest in the middle class, many of whom feel they have much to lose, and [this] makes raising consciousness within the community at large, and partnerships with the working poor, difficult to maintain.*

Resistance to, and the disruption of, neoliberal processes requires a sustained approach, according to Charles, based on the moral and ethical development of social work: '*The difference between challenging the system and merely breaking the rules reflects the need to take moral responsibility*'.

This notion of energising a morality against neoliberalism, Charles concludes, provides the opportunity to develop a sophisticated narrative to combat neoliberal common sense in the public sphere. In Jillian's eyes, this ability to resist neoliberalism does require '*a strong social work identity that makes people more resilient*'. Wendy is also positive about the possibility of resistance by social work: '*The neoliberal project is less certain than it appears, because where there is oppositional power there is inevitably resistance*'.

Michael reflects that the history of social work tells a story about the way in which it has resisted much in the past. He feels that social work tends to resist in ways that are less direct:

> *Social work's approach has been much more nuanced and subtle; it works to persuade or dissuade, it works to modify, to take the edges off rather than to resist directly, and in fact, from my observation, social workers run a mile when there is conflict.*

Resistance comes in multiple forms, both formal and informal, according to Kathleen, where traditionally the heartland of resistance in the industrial world was unions and professional associations, which sought to influence, resist and highlight issues of public and

professional interest. The post-industrial state has brought with it a usurping of these traditional formal avenues of resistance, and under neoliberalism resistance has more often been through informal activities, according to Kathleen, either at the individual level or through social movements: '*Informal processes of resistance have developed, based on noncompliance and political resistance that may not illicit conscious intent*'.

In Zoe's view, what is necessary is an understanding of both formal and informal acts of resistance:

> *Individuals need to have a clear idea of what they are dealing with […;] ideas can be distorted under neoliberalism and we don't always recognise them in their distorted form, and so we can reinforce its agenda.*

In this context, knowledge only becomes powerful if it can be used to bring about the conditions of change. Consequently, the necessity for a sophisticated analysis to contend with the re-composition of the state, and with new methods of domination under neoliberalism, can lead to new forms of resistance and class struggle (Morton 2002). Gramsci (1971, p. 55) argues that appreciating the commonalities between domination and resistance is part of any analysis. He notes how social groups within a hegemony are inevitably fragmented, dislocated, and '*always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up*'.

This is particularly pointed under neoliberalism, where creative forms of resistance are necessary to overcome what Cox (1987) describes as the 'conveyer belt' of the neoliberal state. For forms of resistance to be effective, they require the development of counter-hegemonies, contested discourses that challenge, directly and indirectly, neoliberal processes of consent. These need to 'become a popular, mass phenomenon, with a concretely world-wide character, capable of modifying (even if the result includes hybrid combinations) popular thought and mummified popular culture' (Gramsci 1971, p. 417). Forms of resistance and the development of counter-hegemonic responses are never secure, are changeable by context, and require popularisation and massification.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which social work has sought to disrupt and resist neoliberal hegemony. What is also evident from this dialogue is that contributors feel that social work has not formed effective processes of resisting, either through formal or

informal processes, and that while there are individual acts of resistance and disruption, these have largely been easily accommodated by neoliberal hegemonic processes.

Social work, however, has resisted and disrupted neoliberal hegemony, in a number of contexts and in a number of ways. Organisationally, managerialist approaches have altered social work's context and placed it in an invidious position. On the one hand, seeking to find a fit with new neoliberal government processes and to contend with new professional arrangements, and on the other seeking to challenge many of the assumptions and the validity of the managerialist approach – both of which have been exceedingly difficult. Neoliberalism has stealthily reorganised relations of production through the de-professionalisation and proceduralising of professions, including social work. This has combined with general trends to proletarianise and disempower workforces to fit a contemporary capitalist economic agenda. This has had a marked effect on social work and its professional identity, but can be seen to be disrupted by efforts to create environments that both encourage and engage with sophisticated analysis.

Social work's ability to engage in disruptive and resistant activities has been hampered by the direct challenge of new relations of production, where disciplinary knowledge and skill are replaced by a management orthodoxy, undermining the valued elements of social work's professional project. Social work has resisted managerialism in many ways, through subtle processes of modification that often entail individual- or location-specific actions, either seeking to undermine neoliberalism, or to inject more sophisticated understandings of social issues and problems. While these might not constitute counter-hegemonic forces directly, they do act to destabilise elements of neoliberal hegemony by countering its common sense.

One of the most significant challenges for social work has been the altered nature and arrangement of the state under neoliberalism. With a history of operating within social democratic conceptions of the state, social work ideas and approaches are both relevant to and reflected in policy settings. Under neoliberal hegemony, not only has social work's identity as a fundamental social aspect of the state been transformed, but so, too, has its position within civil society been to a large degree usurped. The consequence has been the development of an orthodoxy in which social problems are individually pathologised and responses proceduralised through managerial processes.

The changes to the civil space and the opportunity to contribute to policy processes and debates have left social work somewhat flat-footed. There are examples, however, of social work's opportunities and potentialities in the public realm, marked by alignments with broad social movements, and cross-disciplinary collaborations and narratives. The changes to the civil space by neoliberalism have made it difficult for social work to have public force and collective ideas. The desire of social work to find relevance in the contemporary context has presented it with a range of intellectual and practice issues which have been exacerbated by the reduced role of social workers as public intellectuals offering alternative narratives.

This role of developing a contemporary public voice as opposition to neoliberal hegemony relies, in the view of a number of contributors, on social work enlivening its concept of its political project. One of the ways that this has happened is through pedagogical and knowledge processes in higher education. Several contributors highlight an appetite within institutions to maintain a critical voice, and to engage in pedagogical approaches that foster the development of critical voices and debate.

This chapter has demonstrated the complex and interrelated set of challenges faced by social work under neoliberalism, and has shown clear evidence of the ways in which social work's ideas, knowledge and expertise have been thwarted. There are, however, examples that demonstrate opportunities and ideas within social work that both challenge neoliberal orthodoxy and exemplify the way in which social work educators, and others, have disrupted and resisted in a variety of contexts. The significant challenge for social work is how it might harness and construct a counter-hegemonic voice and practices.

CHAPTER 9
NEOLIBERAL HEGEMONY, COUNTER-HEGEMONY, AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR SOCIAL WORK

This study set out to understand the impact of neoliberal hegemony on social work in Australia through an examination of neoliberalism and its structural, political, institutional, cultural and social processes of dominance. The critical literature on neoliberalism has provided insights both into the ways in which neoliberal hegemony is understood, and its history and trajectory as part of new global capitalism. This thesis has explored the ways in which structural, cultural and political processes have been used within contemporary capitalism to legitimise and maintain neoliberalism's dominance.

The contextual circumstances of neoliberalism have been considered important in coming to understand the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia, given the profession's traditional position within the state, and the transition to new post-welfare state forms. The Australian welfare state and its social policy approaches have been formative in developing social work's identity and legitimacy, and in providing a platform for community debate.

Examining the mechanisms of neoliberal dominance has formed a central part of this thesis, in which the processes of cultural hegemony, outlined by Antonio Gramsci and neo-Gramscian academics, have been used to analyse neoliberalism's ideas and practices, its impact on social work, and the possibilities for critical responses within Australian social work.

REVISITING THE CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As Hall (2011) points out, neoliberalism can be seen as complex and nefarious in many respects; it takes on different forms in different locations. This thesis has taken a critical theoretical approach to the issue of the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia, examining the structural aspects of its continued domination. This thesis engaged with the idea that cultural, spatial and political elements of neoliberal domination form a part of the mechanisms of its hegemony. The ramifications of these processes are significant for social work's identity and position within Australian society.

While the thesis highlighted a range of critical approaches to neoliberal hegemony, a neo-Gramscian analysis was considered to offer a valuable insight into neoliberal processes, its mechanisms of dominance, and its inherent flaws and weaknesses. Building upon critical notions of class and political economy that identify neoliberalism as a project to restore class power and maintain capitalist dominance, which had been weakened by the embedded liberalism of the post-war years, the thesis explored the neoliberal mechanisms of privatisation, marketisation, commodification and financialisation that have been used to create a new form of a hegemony of capital (Barrett 2010; Cahill 2011, 2014; Hall 2011; Harvey 2005, 2006).

Neoliberal ideas and methods, the thesis has contended, have had a particular purchase on social work in Australia, having reconstructed its institutional frameworks and practices, often to the detriment of social work practitioners and educators. What is also evidenced in the study is the incomplete nature of neoliberal domination, where resistant ideas and practices have, to some degree, made the control of social work more difficult. The lack of penetration of neoliberal ideas and practices in some areas of social work in Australia reveals the efforts of social work educators, practitioners and consumers to thwart neoliberalism's hegemonic advance by acts of disruption and resistance.

The thesis extended its structural analysis by considering neoliberal processes of hegemony that have sought to restructure relationships within society by cultural means. Several authors (Brenner, Peck & Theodore 2010; Peck & Tickell 2002; Larner 2000) provide ways of understanding neoliberalism as a variable hegemonic process, designed to create a dominant consent using cultural means. In this account, neoliberal hegemonic dominance uses relationships within society, as well as institutional processes that infiltrate knowledge, power, and the technologies of the self.

REVISITING THE RESEARCH AIMS

In an effort to understand the impact of neoliberalism on social work, the study developed research aims to examine the impact of neoliberal hegemony as it is understood by social work educators in the Australian context. The thesis outlined how Australian social work educators conceive of neoliberalism and its impact. The aims of the study, outlined in Chapter 1, were:

- To examine the nature and processes of neoliberalism as a hegemonic project in Australian social work education, and
- To analyse how Australian social work educators understand the possibilities for an emancipatory critical response to the impact of neoliberal hegemony in Australian social work.

The research aims were based on two fundamental assumptions: that neoliberalism should be seen as a complex ideology with a high degree of variability; and that neoliberal processes often mask how it is understood, and its impact on Australian social work. The study explored two specific aspects of neoliberalism: the way in which social work education had been impacted by neoliberal hegemony; and the way in which Australian social work might develop critical and emancipatory responses to its hegemony.

The first aim highlighted debate and discussion about the processes, mechanisms and impact of neoliberalism, and provided an opportunity to examine and understand the ways in which neoliberal hegemonic processes have transpired for social work in Australia. Contributors identified a range of ways in which neoliberal hegemonic processes have affected social work education.

The second aim addresses the possibilities for social work as a critical response to neoliberalism. Contributors' accounts highlighted how social work has both developed opportunities but also curtailed its ability to offer resistance to neoliberal hegemonic ideas through a lack of a strong theoretical, political, and cultural identity.

Drawing on a neo-Gramscian analysis of hegemonic processes, the thesis has argued that social work in Australia and its educational project have been drawn into cultural processes of creating a neoliberal 'common sense' (Cox 1981; Hall 2011). The thesis contends that social work's location within the Australian welfare state has made it a significant site that has been directly affected, influenced, and conflicted by neoliberal ideas and actions. As a function of state-sponsored social provision, social work in Australia has been 'hailed' to a new individualised construction of the welfare state. This has, in part, required social work's accommodation of neoliberal ideas and practices. The thesis, however, also argues that there remain, for social work, opportunities to challenge neoliberal hegemony directly, through social action, institutions, and disrupting neoliberal ideas and practices.

REVISITING THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

Social work has occupied a supportive role in the landscape of Australian welfare state social provision, and developed hand-in-hand with its rapid growth post-war. Social policy processes until the 1970s were formed around ideas of a restricted version of the welfare state, in which social work played a role in service and policy development, and in the delivery of services. The definitive changes wrought by the neoliberal project upon Australian society and social work in the 1980s and 1990s have accentuated the challenges for social work in Australia

Neoliberalism's impact on social work, this study suggests, occurs across a broad range of its activities and contexts. It has particular impacts upon service systems, resources, knowledge, and pedagogical systems within Australian social work education. The neoliberal project has sought to damage and corrupt social work's mission, practices, and identity. Neoliberal hegemonic processes have disrupted its professional project, constrained its critical intellectual endeavours and activities, and reconstructed its relationships with its service users and with civil society.

Based on critical academic accounts of neoliberalism and its impact on social work, this study documents social work educators' accounts of the complexity of neoliberal ideological forms, and the ways in which Australian social work has been complicit in and resistant to its approaches. This research endeavour is marked by a desire to establish a unique, complex and diffuse account of the diverse impacts of neoliberalism on social work in Australia. Within the thesis, hegemony is viewed as having complex elements, where the relations of everyday life, the state, and world ideological ideas work to create a 'common sense' that proliferates across national boundaries.

Contributing to social change is one of social work's key claims as a discipline, and while social work in the Australian context remains committed to the development of opportunities for social change – to support social justice, and to create circumstances of equality –, its ability to respond, the evidence of contributors suggests, has been constrained by its location within the state, making it difficult to identify and challenge neoliberal processes, and the profession's lack of a critical political project. The study indicates that social work in Australia has accommodated a number of elements of neoliberalism, but that it still retains the potential to challenge the oppression created by contemporary capitalism.

The thesis has shown that the neoliberal hegemony of the 21st Century is evidenced by a shift towards a new form of ideological agreement, a consent rather than a consensus, that forms and reforms to maintain and advance capitalism within Australian society. This, the thesis concluded, is consistent with Carroll's (2006) assertion that contemporary capitalism within a globalised world has desensitised and de-politicised boundaries, and reconstructed citizenship in consumer terms. The study has highlighted ways in which this has been progressed in Australia.

DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN THEMES

As discussed in Chapter 6, neoliberal processes of hegemony have sought and maintained their cohesion through a social consent based on dominating institutions, organisations and everyday processes, and by stifling opposition. Its institutional and cultural methods of appropriating and manipulating consent, the study found, have had a range of impacts on Australian social work and social work education.

The thesis has drawn on the themes of accommodation, resistance and disruption to explore the structural, cultural and political impact of neoliberal hegemony. The study has sought to identify counter-hegemonic opportunities for social work in the Australian context. The research uncovered a variety of ways in which social work education has been used, in part, as a managerial and marketisation process, with the effect of making social work a product within the educational context, reducing intellectual pursuit, subverting policy debate, and fortifying neoliberal ideas of the market.

This first section of Chapter 6 explored the ways in which social work has been hailed to neoliberal ideas and practices, and provides an account of the way in which it has accommodated, and sought to resist and disrupt, its progress. Privatisation and marketisation have been used, the study found, to control and influence social work ideas and practices and cultural processes used to impact and influence what is understood as social work knowledge. The study reveals the use of neoliberal techniques to neutralise critical language and knowledge, and to re-signify the meaning of social work ideas and practices. The thesis argues that, within neoliberal hegemony, the construction of consent, using co-option, manipulation, and ideological control, is a process significantly at odds with social work's history of social consensus. While this gives the appearance of dominance without respite,

Buroway (1979) considers that neoliberal hegemony is founded on a 'thin' consent, vulnerable to challenge and forms of resistance.

The study has articulated the significance of the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia, finding that social work has been ill-equipped to respond to the changed nature of the Australian welfare state and its social policy processes and directions. The study shows ways in which social work's responses to neoliberalism in Australia have been muted, disparate and ill-defined. The research found that, in part, this can be considered a consequence of the profession's unfamiliarity with neoliberal hegemonic methods, and with broader political questions of the changed role of the state and citizenship. This thesis contains evidence of the co-option of social work practices, and of the corruption of some of its ideas as part of neoliberal hegemony.

The next section of the sixth chapter provided a summary of some of the ways in which social work in Australia has accommodated, resisted, and disrupted neoliberalism. The study reflected upon the institutional actions taken within organisations, and on the individual responses of practitioners and educators. While resistant actions by social work in Australia have been limited, their presence reflects opportunities for ideological and practical resistance through long-held commitments to ideas and values of social justice and enfranchisement, and a critical analysis of practices and approaches that do not recognise the historical and structural impediments in many citizens' lives.

Social work in Australia has been required to comply with a range of neoliberal ideas and practices, through the dominance of neoliberal ideas within organisations, educational institutions, and governments. This study, however, reveals the way in which social work in Australia has also been complicit in the acceptance and stabilisation of neoliberal processes and structures. The study confirms how social work, and the institutions that support it in Australia, have, in part, been overwhelmed by difficult, and often confused, neoliberal processes, which has curbed its ability to respond.

The social work educators who contributed to this study mentioned some of the ways Australian social work has accommodated neoliberalism through the acceptance of managerial and marketising structures and processes, as well as social work's complicity in entrenching individualisation, consumerism, and professional self-interest, all of which has worked to advance neoliberal ideals. The reflections of critical educators suggest that

Australian social work has not only often been compliant with the neoliberal state, but that it has also failed to develop a coherent critical political project.

Social work has at times been wrong-footed, this research suggests, in relation to neoliberal processes, and has lacked the ability to develop a coordinated response to challenge its orthodoxy. Individual social workers and educators have, as a consequence, often sought to disrupt and resist neoliberal hegemonic ideas, individually within organisations, or externally through activities in the public realm. The evidence presented suggests that the lack of a clear political agenda on the part of social work in Australia, and its constrained links to broader social movements within civil society have limited its ability to resist and disrupt neoliberalism advance.

The difficulty of resisting neoliberal ideas and practices is not due only to its dominance, but also reflects that resistance without a substantive project is easily diverted or subsumed into its broader project. In Carroll's (2010) view, responses that simply oppose and mimic a hegemony do not amount to substantive counter-hegemonic processes.

The study identified two of the major structures used by neoliberalism for achieving change: privatisation, the promotion of private capital over public ownership, and marketisation, the construction of commercial markets and quasi-markets in social goods. Both of these have been used to substantially alter the relations of production within contemporary capitalism. The result has been the selling of public assets, the reconstruction of organisations along commercial lines, the creation of an increasingly 'flexible' workforce, the de-professionalisation and proletarianising of skills and knowledge, and the casualisation of workplaces. Some aspect of each of these, the research found, has had an effect on social work in Australia.

These industrial processes form part of a broader effort to 'wither the welfare state'. Contributors to the study thought that neoliberal efforts to reduce public expenditure and lower citizen expectations of the state has been a recurrent theme within social work over some 40 years, through a range of privatising and marketising mechanisms. For social work, this had been significantly experienced through the creation of privatised services and organisations: the outright sale of assets, the creation of public–private partnerships, the creation of quasi-markets, and through managerialisation and corporatisation. While one of the key functions of neoliberalism has been the reduction in state expenditure on social welfare, the study found, equally, that the redirection of state resources to private

organisations has had a significant impact on the social services sector. As outlined earlier, the shift in the relations of production from a wage earners' welfare state, with limited social provision, to a competitive managerialism, this research shows, is an environment both unfamiliar to social work, and one with which it is ill-equipped to grapple in a substantive way. This has meant a reduced ability of Australian social work to respond in a system that is both unfamiliar and anathema to its long-held principles and ideas (Jane).

This new system of industrial organisation, the study shows, has had a detrimental effect on Australian social welfare organisations (Mary, Wendy). Social work in Australia since the 1970s, has taken a political approach based on a conventional model of the elite profession. As a profession, its industrial function split in the mid-1970s, when activist and unionist elements left to form the Australian Social Welfare Union. The professional social work association has not substantially pursued a political/industrial stance since (Mendes 2007).

This study describes a neoliberal industrial system in which social workers are part of a market-oriented commercial workforce, centred on 'flexibility', 'efficiency', and proceduralised managerial processes that have sought to substantially alter the fabric of employment (Wendy). The consequence for social work, as this study describes, is that, at the organisational and practice levels, practice and services in Australia are simplified and proceduralised, making the use of unskilled or semi-skilled staff easier (William).

Contributors to the study highlighted how managerial processes of proceduralism have had the effect of de-skilling and de-industrialising the Australian social service workforce, including social work (Wendy). This is consistent with what Baines (2008, p. 3) describes as the 'tangible industrial effect of controlling and standardising work'. This, in her view, has the consequence of reducing union power and membership, and contains duplicitous managerial changes that emphasise quantification, accountability and efficiency, while hiding processes of de-skilling and proceduralisation.

An example offered by one contributor described how neoliberal models of procedural managerialism within child protection services in the UK represented the potential to protect vulnerable children in the eyes of some organisations. The development of risk frameworks and proceduralised methods within human services, while intended to provide more effective services, meant that workers were less likely to examine how risk management methods and ideas interacted with neoliberal ideas (Jennifer). This prospect of

complex interrelations between managerialism and on-the-ground practices creates the potential for social work to advance neoliberal hegemonic ideas (Jillian).

One of the significant industrial changes, Waters et al. (2015) contend, is that the disciplinary power of professions has been transplanted to the business manager, not just signalling a move to managerial proceduralism, but framing a new relationship between workers and the state and the reinstatement of economic elites as the dominant force. In Australia, the changes are evident in both government and non-government social services organisations, where social workers have changed from being social advocates and program and policy developers to managers of outcomes, organisational resources, and the meeting of key performance criteria based on economic models (Linda). The effect of these processes, as has been uncovered in the study, has been to deconstruct professional relationships and apply consumerist interpretations to all relationships with individuals (Linda). As outlined earlier, Harris and White (2009) identify the shift as being from 'bureau professionals' to 'flexible process workers' with proceduralised roles and accountabilities.

The concern raised in this study is that a new-post industrialism has revalued work only in terms of it meeting procedural economic outcomes. This proceduralisation and routinisation of jobs produces a de-professionaled workforce through role segmentation and the application of managerial evaluation measures (Fabricant & Burghardt 1992). The study found that this has had particular effects on social work in Australia, where semi-skilled human services workers now take on jobs created by sectioning off aspects of professional roles.

Much of the impact of neoliberalism, the study found, has been through managerial instrumental activities within organisations. Within organisations, managerial processes and structures have often had the effect, the study revealed, of changing cultural and political expectations of workers and consumers. These cultural and political processes of neoliberal hegemony create what some contributors see as a new 'normalcy', where expectations are lowered and personal responsibility becomes implicitly accepted (Linda, Zoe).

There remains, however, the potential for resistance to these trends, with a more extensive engagement of social work in the public realm, and the projection of a counter-narrative (Mary, Zoe).

Responding to neoliberalism, and achieving social change is possible, according to Gary, through the development of new alliances, or by extending old ones, that build cross-

disciplinary and/or -sectorial collectives. He sees, within his university, that creating cross-disciplinary connections has led to collaborative knowledge development and solidarity within academic groups, and has worked to develop models of topics such as 'care' that are not bounded by a disciplinary desire to territorialise (Gary).

In the post-war years, social work in Australia has pursued an 'elite professional' identity, where boundaries and regulation are designed to produce recognition, and defined roles and skills through professional registration within the state. In the context of this research, some sections of the social work population see this approach as a pathway to ensuring a position for social work in Australia into the future. Others, however, have seen it as self-serving, and as missing opportunities to challenge neoliberalism. Mendes (2007, p. 28) describes social work in Australia as prioritising 'self-interested professional objectives such as social work registration and obtaining authorization to receive third party payments, rather than policy objectives which benefit clients'.

The debate about social work's identity, as described by contributors to the study, has focused largely on the idea of social work as a profession within a neoliberal regime. Wendy, for example, sees social work in Australia as having pursued a self-interested identity at the expense of broader issues of oppression and disadvantage that have been exacerbated by neoliberalism. For some contributors, the perceived failure of Australian social work to defend the welfare state and its clientele was cause for strong criticism, particularly in light of the profession's actions to protect its own interests within a post-welfare state (Keith, Wendy, Lesley, Sally).

The accommodation by social work of neoliberal ideas of a managerialist-regulated profession, in Linda's view, not only devalues the profession's ideas, but makes it subservient to neoliberal wishes. This notion of a proceduralised social work professional identity contradicts its long-held ideals of justice and change. Part of the difficulty for social work has been that, while it articulates ethical concern for the rights of individuals and groups, according to Mendes (2007, p. 29), the codes of ethics within the profession provide little detail as to how these should be actioned, leaving the profession with the difficulty of turning them into something more than merely rhetorical statements.

One of the concerns raised in the study was the way in which the Australian Association of Social Workers, through the advancement of a regulated professional identity and the registration of social workers, has accommodated neoliberal ideas of a quantifiable,

proceduralised workforce. This debate about the nature of social work as a profession in Australia has continued for some time, and shows contrary concerns that a failure to adapt to neoliberal ideas about individualism and evidence-based service delivery would render social work redundant. At the centre of this debate has been a clash between social justice and pragmatism (Michael).

The privatising and marketising of social services in Australia has led to the accommodation of neoliberal individualism and professional proceduralism by social work (Wendy, Linda, Jane). The individual has always been prominent within social work ideas and practice as the individual within a social and political 'context'. The individual as constructed by neoliberalism is a choice-making consumer who is both the activator of their power and responsible for their own destiny. Historically, Australian social work has identified the individual not as a consumer, but as a person affected by broader structural oppressions, as outlined by the AASW (2013):

> In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus on both assisting with and improving human wellbeing and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as system or structural issues) that may impact on wellbeing or may create inequality, injustice and discrimination.

The contributors recognised the ongoing conflict between neoliberal individualism and social work ideas of social justice. These do not just occur, they suggest, in areas of direct practice, service provision and the allocation and use of resources, but also affect policy decisions and directions, as service frameworks come to rely more and more on individualised constructions of complex problems, and exclude broad social and structural issues.

The study cited evidence of neoliberal models being applied to casework, where risk assessments identify personal behaviours and capacities in terms of meeting expectations. These proceduralised management approaches have the effect of negating the complexity of human need and the history and variability of individual circumstances. Jennifer, Sally, Linda, and Wendy all purport that the use of quantification instruments, such as risk assessment and evidence-based practice within Australian social work have encouraged social work practice to define individuals in particular ways, and to align social work with neoliberal individualism. These processes have the effect of making the individual identifiable, responsible, and a choice-making consumer (Carroll 2009).

Clarke (2007) argues that neoliberalism has replaced the democratic citizen with the economic consumer, within an economic market where collective responsibility is replaced by a radical individualism. The result is an individual who is either an 'economic powerhouse' or an 'economic bludger'; this study found that individuals with whom social work has a relationship are mostly depicted as the latter (Linda, Jennifer, Michael).

The application of neoliberal consumerist models of service delivery, the study showed, have been challenged in some social work contexts. Consumerist approaches have not been successful in some areas, as Kathleen describes, where there is strong political opposition, or where the roles are difficult to proceduralise, and in those areas, social work ideas and approaches have been applied surreptitiously. The public prominence of neoliberal practices, according to some contributors, has been undermined in some workplaces by those practices' inherent failings, or by the actions of workers (Jennifer, Kathleen).

Positivistic models of social relationships are still limited in many contexts, and for many workers they rub up against social work's structural disciplinary background of viewing issues within their social context.

However, for Australian social work to wholly accommodate neoliberal individualism, it must accept a naïve interpretation of the individual as a 'free agent', isolated from the structural context of wealth, class and power. The study found that social work is becoming enmeshed in clinical individual processes, precluding discussion of structural issues that are affecting people's lives (Linda). This has been enhanced by efforts to redefine social work roles and skills as a regulated post-industrial profession (Jennifer). The study suggests that, to a degree, social work in Australia has also been marginalised from the professional control of its own relationship, and that its professional knowledge has been marginalised.

While appearing dominant, the change to a very individualist, consumer approach to the design and delivery of social services has not been successful in all areas. Some of the actions by social workers, identified in this research, have come to mirror neoliberal disruptive methods, where social workers act to infuse critical ideas and a disruptive critique into working situations (Jennifer). Social workers' responses to the procedural practices of neoliberalism, in areas such as casework and organisational management, has been to challenge the effectiveness of neoliberal service delivery methods. Within the study, actions

such as this were seen as having the potential to work against managerialism and proceduralisation.

The pressure applied to social services organisations in Australia to comply with neoliberal managerial structures and practices, while it has evolved over time, has increased significantly since the 1990s. This managerial pressure on social work has occurred predominantly through organisations, where social workers were often positioned with little alternative but to comply; workers feel there is no alternative, as Wendy and Linda felt. Neoliberal managerial processes are also manifest in other areas of social work beyond organisational and direct practice contexts, in areas of policy, professional decision-making, and identity.

One of the significant ways that neoliberal domination has been secured, according to this study, has been through commanding control of knowledge and pedagogical processes within social work. Wendy, for example, identifies how, within Australian universities, academics have been reconstructed in managerial terms, and their activities scripted to a managerial agenda. In Cox's (1989, p. 39) view, domination requires the ability to control 'the production and reproduction of knowledge', and 'the social relations, morals and institutions that are prerequisites to the production of physical goods'. Contributors to the study identified that, through the reconstructing of knowledge processes and the re-configuring of ideas to new purposes, social work and social work education in Australia have been drawn to a new construction of the 'social' (Linda).

Complex social knowledge and social policy responses have been refashioned into a form of chronic individualism. According to Duyvendak, Knijn and Kremer (2006), the shift in knowledge systems under neoliberalism has elevated 'command knowledge', where procedures and outcomes become dominant and ideas are useful only when they fit within procedural and marketing norms, over 'disciplinary knowledge'. The consequences have been, for disciplines such as social work, that knowledge that has been central to their ideas and ideals becomes discredited and denunciated as it no longer fits the regime (Wendy). 'New' knowledge is required to fit within marketable product statements, and within pedagogical processes aimed at consumerism.

The difficulty this has created for Australian social work and social work education, the study found, is that the ideas and practices of social work have become disavowed, or repurposed with other meanings, depleting or destroying their original meaning. These

reconstructed ideas and meanings get used, as a consequence, as a buffer between the market and those considered ‘problematic’ or ‘difficult’ (Kathleen).

Relationships are redefined in consumerist terms, making knowledge and the structures around knowledge valuable only in instrumental terms. In this study, this is evidenced by the retreat within higher education from teachers being ‘independent academics’ to ‘some sort of management consultant’ (Wendy). This commodification of professions and their relationships with colleagues and clients has the effect of ‘hollowing out’ disciplines (Linda).

The Dawkins higher education reforms of the early 1980s set Australian universities on a path of the development of a mass higher education market and cut-throat competition for student enrolments (Marginson 1997). These reforms moved education at the commonwealth level from being overseen by an independent education authority to the Department of Employment and Education, leading to the redirection of academic pursuit to the employment market. In Australia, academic institutions have become increasingly regulated, and have taken on the persona of large corporations (Marginson & Considine 2000). Disciplines have become products for economic benefit (or not), and professions have come to be valued for their ability to attract customers, align with commercial concerns, and offer marketable knowledge products (Wendy).

The study identified several ramifications of the marketisation of Australian higher education for social work education and educators. The loss of educators’ power over curricula in favour of managers, and constrictive managerial pedagogical processes where the focus is on instructive notions of knowledge, have sidelined academic notions of debate and inquiry. The consequent reduction in academic debate contributes to the loss of chances for critical thought (Linda, William).

Reconfiguring the purposes of knowledge within higher education, the study outlined, has also resulted in the managerial relocation of some schools of social work to locations in disparate faculties, where disciplinary alignment is of little concern. Accommodating universities’ economic objectives, the study notes, has come to reflect a diminution of social work scholarship, and a negation of its discipline-specific knowledge (Linda, Jennifer).

This study also attested to managerial processes having sought to codify language in terms of its usefulness to neoliberalism, evidenced, in the Australian context, by an elevation of ‘quantifiable’ knowledge in social work over status legitimate practice and ideas. This

quantification of complex social issues and problems leads to rationality and calculability being mistaken for thought and knowledge (Wendy). The methods of quantification used by neoliberal managerialism seek to align language and knowledge within neoliberalism's version of the social world.

Neubauer (2011) suggests that hegemonic processes reconfigure language and knowledge to control how issues and circumstances may be viewed and understood. The repeated and reinforced use of particular language forms, such as 'the sanctity of the market', the 'evil of the state', and the 'centrality of the consumer', becomes embedded within institutions and the actions of individuals to ensure neoliberal hegemony. The difficulty for social work of challenging this hegemonic use of language is that it is embedded within neoliberalism at a level beyond merely a managerial change of culture (Jillian).

Critical discourses among social work academics remain prominent, with an eclectic array challenging and confronting neoliberal ideas and practices. Contributors to the study described a strong critical presence in the Australian social work literature that encourages engagement in debates about ideas and practices. The study also showed, however, that public discussion of, and activism in relation to, these ideas is less common.

The development of pedagogical and knowledge construction processes using critical educational pedagogy is essential to building and maintaining critical knowledge (Wendy). It also encourages practitioners and educators to challenge neoliberal hegemony in the public sphere (Linda). Mendes (2007, p. 27) argues that although social workers have historically been seen as apolitical, there is evidence that 'social workers in Australia and elsewhere have been involved in social and political activism'.

This thesis presented evidence of approaches and practices that work to maintain a critical voice within social work. As Zoe points out, social work has continued to have a critical academic literature that, in her view, provides a backdrop to social work ideas and practice. Within social work education in Australian universities, educators who have contributed to this study used or witnessed the use of pedagogical methods that give students critical skills, in both theory and practice.

Social work's purpose and ideals are directly challenged by a state-sponsored rejection of collective and structural disadvantage under neoliberalism. The research revealed that, while social work in Australia has held strong ideals about social justice, structural disadvantage and oppression, it has also historically accommodated and adapted to social

policy approaches by governments (Michael). However, in the past these changes have occurred within the context of a more benign liberal welfare state, where there has been some recognition of the social consequences of capitalism.

A number of contributors see this as a significant change to the methods of capital accumulation in Australia, as well as the repositioning of the approach by the state, as undermining social work's prospects for achieving social change (Keith, Wendy, Charles, Linda, Zoe). The neoliberal state has withered social work's ability to identify and challenge the state by reducing access to policy frameworks and stifling their political voice (Keith). In part, this may be due to social work's relatively small workforce and professional membership, its difficulty engaging with community projects and social movements, and its limited experience of activism, all of which have contributed to this lack of development (Mendes 2007).

The ability of neoliberalism to exclude groups and ideas from policy processes has been an effective method of maintaining hegemony. For social work and social work education, that has occurred by redefining the parameters for policy decision-making along business lines. The effect in some Australian universities, according to the study, is that social work educators have largely been excluded from policy decisions that affect curricula, pedagogy, and resources.

In the context of Australian social services organisations, the potential for social work to be involved in policy processes, according to this research, has been limited by managerial processes that restrict and select the voices heard, and filter the way in which they are heard. Processes of feedback and accountability, and the encouragement of workers not to be 'out of step' with market idealism, limit both policy access and input. New neoliberal policy frameworks have direct consequences for the way social work gets practised, as evidenced by Zoe in the study who pointed out where the '*sorts of policies that are being produced by government and being put into practice mean that social work gets practised within those constraints*'.

The function of the state under neoliberalism has come under particular scrutiny in this study, which has challenged its role of working in the interest of capital. One of the key concerns raised has been the evaporation of state commitment to collective and structural causes of social problems (Mary). The study's contention is that new state approaches to the individual of responsibilising consumer citizens are in line with the 'mutual obligations'

approach generally applied within the Australian context since the 1990s, and that this has limited the opportunities for social work to encourage and develop other forms of relationships and practices within the community.

The critical literature argues that the state has taken on a new role under neoliberalism: acting as a mechanism to stabilise capitalism (Jessop 2002b). The state becomes pivotal in shifting its own responsibility, away from issues of citizens' and democratic rights, and towards capital (Linda). In this study, the transformation of the role of the state is viewed as a shift from an industrial capitalism to a new regime of post-industrial capital accumulation, a situation which is unfamiliar, and thus less understood, in Australian social work (Keith). A number of contributors to the study see this in class terms, feeling that the processes of capital accumulation within the contemporary capitalism are a sustained effort to disempower those who are disenfranchised through neoliberal processes, and to create a subservient new working class (Linda).

Opportunities for social work and social work education in Australia to participate in the public realm have become more limited as neoliberal hegemony has strived to shift policy processes to the market (Gray 2011). Access to public space has been restricted by redefining who can be actors within it, and by processes that deter individuals and groups from contributing. According to responses from the study, social work in Australia has largely vacated the public space, either because of neoliberal efforts of exclusion, or through social work's pursuit of its professional agenda within the neoliberal state (Keith, William).

This lack of identifiable public critique and debate by social work, according to contributors, is in part due to its lack of a political project, which makes it difficult for it to garner support for its ideas and practices. The study also found that the Australian Association of Social Workers has not been able to adequately defend social work's ideals, and that its campaign for the registration of social workers (and social work) within Australia has worked both to accommodate neoliberal ideas of post-professionalism, and to limit public activism (Linda, Wendy, Charles).

The AASW, however, has long been a contributor to the public realm in particular ways. Those involvements have often centred on developing responses to governments' reports and policy responses in the public space. In recent years, the association has developed policy and position papers on gambling, asylum seekers, domestic and family violence, child protection, and ageing.

Neoliberal ideas of individual citizenship that decry collective and democratic concerns and promote disempowered relationships between citizens and the state leave social workers to their own devices, according to Ryan. For social work, struggling with an evaporating concern for collective issues, and without effective political and lobbying power, this means that ground is being taken from beneath its feet, and that social workers can only resist individually, or remain subservient to neoliberal ideas and practices.

Efforts to commodify and proceduralise skills and processes within Australian social work, this study has pointed out, have resulted in attention being drawn away from opportunities for broader public discourse. The lack of an articulate, sophisticated public voice for social work not only means that it vacates public ground, but also increases the chances of neoliberal practices gaining acceptance (Mary, Zoe).

The challenge of articulating an identity within civil society is a common situation among traditional professions in the context of neoliberal control of civil society, but it has been exacerbated for social work in Australia by the profession's limited efforts to develop links to broader cultural, political, and disciplinary projects that engage in counter-hegemonic action.

The study revealed that the lack of development of political and intellectual resources by social work in Australia has limited its ability to mount an effective collective response to neoliberalism. Its preoccupation with its own professional project has, in the view of some contributors, worked against social work's ability to develop a political response. Resistance by social workers to neoliberalism, the study has suggested, is more likely to take the form of individual and isolated acts, without a broader connection to a political and cultural project, or a clear and coherent identity (William). Lesley argues that '*social workers, in a way, have let that happen, through not developing an intellectually sophisticated approach to neoliberalism*'. Mendes (2007) highlights that social workers are poorly armed to develop responses to neoliberalism, as there 'continues to be a gap between what social workers typically do in their everyday practice and social action' (Mendes 2007, p. 27).

While neoliberal processes of disruption and crisis-creation within civil society have been most effective in maintaining its hegemony, these form just a part of its methods of hegemonic dominance to create a neoliberal 'common sense', where flexibility, adaptation, disruption, and knowledge construction are used to manufacture consent. Social work's endeavour to counter this neoliberal consumerist 'common sense' has, in the view of Mendes

(2007), been thwarted by Australian social work courses not producing graduates adequately prepared to implement social action objectives (Mendes 2007, p. 29).

Neoliberal relations of production have not only sought to develop a widespread consumerist approach, but to reconstruct the workforce as ‘flexible’ and ‘efficient’. This approach has had the effect of altering the industrial design of work and the rights of workers. While the social work workforce has not formed around a political/industrial model, and its roots, historically, are based on adaptation within the state policy context, social workers maintain a connection with political events. In Baines’ (2010b, p. 19) research, conducted in Canada, social service workers have kept up a level of activism against neoliberalism by participating in public events, lobbying, building coalitions, and joining other organisations.

The instability of any hegemony is the result of its continual battle to maintain dominance through consent. To challenge that hegemony in a lasting way requires the structures and processes ‘to shape those ‘anticipating elements’, so that they may become lasting features of social life’ (Carroll 2010b, p. 169). This thesis has presented evidence that, while there is a dominant neoliberal project, it is not a fixed and unchanging dominance, and that ‘exploiting contradictions and gaps and developing an alternate ‘common sense’’ (Carroll 2010b, p. 169) requires external and internal structural corrosion of its ideas. In Thomas’ (2009, p. 226) view, ‘forces in civil society need to be translated into power within political society’.

Civil society operates in Gramscian terms, as a vehicle for the state to maintain hegemonic dominance. The use of the ‘soft’ institutions of civil society; creating consensus with agreed ideas and values, is more effective in gaining compliance and commitment than the ‘hard’ institutions of the state. As Gramsci (1971) understood it, the state:

> is the integration of a variety of different class interests that are propagated throughout society 'bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity [...] on a “universal” plane. (Gramsci 1971, pp. 181–182)

Hegemony exists as a complex cocktail of elements: the relations of everyday life, the manner in which the state is complicit, the way in which the public space, through civil society, is corrupted, and the way in which common sense becomes proliferated across national boundaries (Bieler & Morton 2006). Each historical bloc, Gramsci (1971) argues, contains within it counter-hegemonic forms, constantly in tension and able to bring about hegemonic change. Hegemony, in these terms, is more than just a simple ‘con trick’, duping

individuals to act in a manner that supports the powerful and to work against their own interests.

Fawcett and Hanlon (2009) argue that the appropriation of social work language and ideas by neoliberalism need not be permanent. Ideas such as ‘community’, ‘participation’, and ‘social entrepreneurship’ can be re-appropriated to facilitate meaningful participation by people in decisions that affect their lives.

Activism in Australian social work has most often been through everyday practice within local community services organisations, or within local communities themselves, reflecting the concern and commitment of individual social workers. More formal processes of activism that engage social work in Australia have come through its association with political processes, either by direct involvement with political parties and professional associations, or through connection with social movements and community groups (Mendes 2007, p. 27). (A social worker was the Greens candidate in the March 2018 by-election in Batman, Victoria, and another was the Labor candidate for the seat of Clark, Tasmania, in the 2019 federal election.)

Within Australia, community organisations such as the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) and Catholic Social Services, have been, and remain, strong advocates for disadvantaged groups within civil society and have been a connecting point for social workers’ ‘involvement in broader political social change activities including local and national electoral politics and global campaigns for human rights’ (Mendes 2007, p. 27). Baines (2010, p. 24) makes the point that while neoliberalism has ‘taken its toll on the sector, civil society and the voluntary sector remain in relative good health within Australia’. What is needed, according to Keith, is the development of a greater role for social workers and social work educators as public intellectuals.

A contributing factor in social work’s ability to disrupt and resist neoliberalism rests on the development of a new social work professionalism, according to this study’s evidence. Building upon a moral conviction to address the central issues of oppression and disadvantage is seen by some contributors as central to challenging neoliberal hegemony (Charles, Linda). These efforts, in Wendy’s view, require a rejection of neoliberal managerialism and the de-professionalisation and de-skilling of social work in Australia. For Gary, the development of a profession without instrumental boundaries would produce a

much stronger collective response and focus attention on commonalities between disciplines and professions.

Peck (2010, p. 109) describes neoliberal hegemony as a project ‘lurching haphazardly onward (if not forward)’, without clear definition or goals. Its vulnerability to counter-hegemony remains contingent upon a concerted alternative socio-political project that offers more than disruptive actions and isolated resistances (Fraser 1989). Creating counter-hegemonic responses, particularly in the context of neoliberalism, is difficult, for, as Carey (2011, p. 582) points out ‘even forms of quasi-collective, get quickly institutionalised’, and turned into hegemonic processes.

To create an alternative hegemony to neoliberalism, Thomas (2009, p. 12) argues that it is necessary for ‘the strategic condensation of a new politics of labour, an attempt at social experimentation beyond capitalism, new forms of democracy and collectivity and new forms or social interaction’. To be effective, counter-hegemony requires compromises, and the development of the allegiances needed for the consolidation of the new hegemonic order (Durmaz 2012).

In summary, the study found that elements of social work, its ideas, practices, structures, and political processes have either accommodated neoliberalism or supported its development, either by design or accident. Social work, in Australia as in many countries, has been unprepared, and in part overwhelmed, by the rapidity and constancy of neoliberal managerial and privatising projects.

This study presented evidence that neoliberal efforts of cultural fragmentation and alterations to social citizenship have withered connections and involvements within the community sphere. The research shows that, in a number of ways, social work in Australia has retreated from the public space and has not been able to articulate an effective political critique.

The research indicates that the accommodation of neoliberal demands by social work in Australia is neither complete nor effective in numerous areas. Social work’s accommodation of neoliberal processes, according to contributors, has continued to act in ways that contravene neoliberal hegemony. They highlight that disruption and resistance has been by individuals, acting in accordance with their commitment to higher moral ideals of justice and equality.

What the study also evidences is the mechanisms of disruption and resistance used by social work in Australia against the neoliberal project. In part, these have occurred within the workplaces of social workers in the form of acts of challenging neoliberal orthodoxy, subverting neoliberal processes by inserting social work values and practices, and by building relationships with workers, clients, and the broader community that defy managerial proceduralism.

Within higher education institutions, educators have applied critical pedagogical approaches that focus on developing critical expertise, rather than just practice skills, and engaging in processes that encourage students to experience the dilemmas of neoliberal hegemony.

More broadly, the development of a more elaborate and vigorous social work political project provides an avenue both for increasing social work's voice and action within civil society, and as a mechanism to enhance social work's relevance and identity.

CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

This thesis takes the view that analysing neoliberal hegemonic processes is an illuminating method of understanding how social work in Australia has been implicated within the neoliberal project. Three themes of response by social work have been explored – accommodation, resistance and disruption –, and these provide a mosaic of the ways in which social work has been both implicated and captured within neoliberal hegemony, and has resisted and disrupted its advance. The thesis argues that neoliberal hegemony has sought to hail social work to new industrial, cultural, and social manners. This thesis has explored the ways in which social work has complied with, resisted, and disrupted this hegemony, and has examined some of the confusions and conflicts faced by social work in its efforts to remain committed to social change.

The thesis has sought to demonstrate that neoliberal processes of hegemony take different forms within contemporary capitalism. It has argued that neoliberalism is neither a clear project, nor one with universal attributes, and that its logic – its 'common sense' – is constantly in danger of confusion, dilution, or collapse. Its methods of conscription and capture are marked by a set of fragile social arrangements built upon redefining citizenship as individual choice, recasting social consensus as a narrow, manufactured consent, and enshrining the state as the facilitator of capitalism under a new social construct. These

processes have provided an avenue by which neoliberalism has been able to advance the interests of capital using neoliberal hegemony to recast the ideas and institutions of the state, citizenship, and civil society.

The study's claim to contribute to scholarship is advanced on two fronts. Firstly, it takes the view that the impact of neoliberalism is not well researched in the context of social work in Australia, and secondly, that the examination of neoliberalism as a cultural hegemonic process has a similarly limited literature. While these represent valuable sources of study in their own right, the development of a critical analysis of neoliberal processes is argued to be valuable in enhancing social work's potential as an emancipatory project

While there is a recognition that the study's smallness in the context of such an expansive topic makes it difficult for it to advance broad-reaching claims, the study has been predicated not upon is volume, but upon the development of a deep narrative and a complex analysis. Australian accounts of neoliberalism have tended to be site- or group-specific, and while these have made valuable contributions, broader conceptions and understandings of social work's relationship with neoliberalism, and Gramscian cultural hegemonic analyses, particularly related to social work in Australia, are limited.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The challenge for social work remains to create processes that bring about social change. As (Spolander et al. 2014) accurately describe, there is still an opportunity to develop critical debate, and new relationships between social work, individuals and the state. Avenues for debate and change for social work in neoliberal times have been curtailed, and while much of the focus on change should be on resisting and disrupting neoliberal processes of creating and maintaining hegemony, there is also the opportunity for social work to consider itself in the light of broad changes in contemporary society.

This study contributes to an analysis of aspects of neoliberalism and their impact on and within social work in Australia. The evidence it has provided suggests that social work in Australia is enmeshed, to some degree, with neoliberal hegemony in a variety of ways. Further examination of these relationships, and the ways in which social work has and might respond to neoliberalism, is considered a logical next step to follow from this preliminary research. In this way, social work has the potential not only to challenge neoliberal ideas and

practices, but also to contribute to the development of a counter-hegemony in these arresting, neoliberal times.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is inevitable that any small study with finite resources will be limited. These limitations are particularly accentuated in this case by the breadth and complexity of the topic. This is a small project which provides a limited account of many of the implications of neoliberalism for social work in Australia. It does, however, I believe, offer opportunities to understand the impact of neoliberalism, and to assist social work in Australia to develop a project that strengthens its relationships with those who are oppressed and disadvantaged by neoliberalism's advancement.

Drawing on only a small group of individuals within a study such as this does have specific benefits. It creates opportunities to develop a creative method of 'flushing out' those issues that may remain hidden within a much larger work, where issues of great size and breadth can make the work more unwieldy and difficult to analyse. Exploring using a small number of contributors provides a way into understanding the complexities and divergences within social work's intertwined relationship with neoliberalism. In this regard, choosing not to construct a project built on descriptive representations or calculable, empirical impacts has also aided the development of diverse and dextrous responses.

The research findings simply offer a glimpse of the challenges and possibilities for social work and, while providing some evidence of the complex, disingenuous and convoluted nature of neoliberalism, and the weaknesses of its hegemony, the research can make no legitimate claim of the generalisability of its conclusions. Instead, I argue that the research can contribute to a better understanding of neoliberalism and its impact, and to encourage further debate and opportunities for critical social change.

The density of the contributors' narrative, in my view, ameliorates the small number of interviewees within the study. The thick narrative formed through the contributions and the critical literature on neoliberalism, has, I argue, contributed a significant source of data, and the possibility of a sophisticated analysis that confronts the complexities of social work in neoliberal times. One of the limitations, though, is that while the data is significant, useful and illuminating, in many ways it only opens the discussion rather than developing an articulated response.

Social work is a very broad discipline, and this study has only drawn upon specific topics in specific ways. Drawing upon the AASW definition of social work, I have used a critical approach to identify how social work has sought to maintain its ideals within a neoliberal context. The thesis, through the insights of contributors, explores the impact of neoliberalism on social work in Australia, as a profession, as a theoretical and ideological construct, as a set of ideas, values and practices, and as a moral imperative. I value greatly the contribution of social work educators to this research, and the particular analyses and understandings they have brought to it, but I also recognise that their accounts do not represent social work per se.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research has alluded to a question without stating it directly: can neoliberalism be halted, and can more democratic processes be developed? This thesis has provided an understanding of the complexity of the neoliberal project and evidence of social work's actions to disrupt and resist certain elements of its progress. As discussed, neoliberalism relies not on social consensus, and the development of a 'democracy' of thought, but rather on a number of techniques to gain and maintain consent. Disruption, through the creation of moral panics and crises, manipulation and co-option of opposing forces and ideas, and the demonising of challenges have made neoliberal hegemony a project constantly in need of resurrection and refurbishment.

These processes of disruption and destabilisation have accelerated over time, and have been exacerbated by fraudulent neoliberal claims (Whyte & Wiegratz 2016). Neoliberalism's strident anti-collectivism and denigration of social supports have been found wanting. Often, its hegemony now relies on some of the very protections it has decried. Collectivist responses now appear in concert with neoliberalism's devout individualism.

The public legitimacy of further neoliberalisation has been eroded, and the utility of decommodification and social protection has, potentially, been highlighted by the exposure of the consequences of market dependence during the crisis (Cahill 2011, p. 490).

Some of the disruptions evident within social work reflect its continued alignment to values and beliefs inconsistent with neoliberal hegemony. Other disturbances come from social work's continued efforts to maintain a vibrant critical educational project, and to encourage the kind of debate and challenge that is usually stifled by neoliberalism. Further,

social work has, either by design or accident, continued to operate in contexts that are overtly neoliberal – probably in order to survive. While broad questions about creating a counter-hegemony are central to social work's value into the future, it has more often taken resistant actions at a local level. As Cahill (2011, p. 489) explains, the task is formidable, and that 'even just halting further neoliberalisation would be a welcome development'.

The ability of neoliberalism to embed itself within local and international cultural and political contexts has made it durable, as has its ability to usurp and manipulate foreign ideas. It has developed a hegemonic approach that has not only enabled it to deal with external crises, but also to use crises as a mechanism of destabilisation. The manufactured consent of neoliberal hegemony, however, remains tentative and vulnerable. Understanding the aims and methods of neoliberal hegemony forms the basis of a concentrated resistance. In the view of Cahill (2011, p. 489), it is perhaps 'realistic to suggest that opportunities now exist for such struggles against neoliberalism to move beyond defensive strategies and onto a more transformative political terrain'.

Social work's place in the process of counter-hegemony rests, in the view of several contributors, with its ability to develop and link itself to an alternative public common sense. Reflecting on the New Zealand context, Humpage (2015, p. 13) points out the intensity of the task for social work:

> There is no silver bullet, but these tiny specks of 'grit' under neoliberalism's wheels should be harnessed as part of a broader plan to disrupt the idea that 'there is no alternative' to its economic and social agenda.

The question of responding to neoliberalism inevitably rests upon assumptions about the nature of its processes and impacts. While it is of little comfort to those who find the effects of neoliberalism dismaying, there are several factors that militate both for and against its continuance.

This research has identified the ways in which neoliberalism has sought to maintain its project, and their direct effect on the views, values and identity of social work. What has made it a difficult project for social work to counter has been neoliberalism's ideological methods and processes, encapsulated by its willingness to circumvent rather than oppose ideas, and to disrupt and obfuscate debate and argument. For social work, the recognition of neoliberal hegemony as unstable, conflicted and dependent for its survival upon its own corruption is key to formulating effective resistance.

While neoliberalism remains confusing and intimidating, its inherent flaws provide opportunities for social work to intervene and advance an agenda of social change. This research has offered an array of interpretations of how social work might respond to neoliberal hegemony, some couched in compliant terms, but others taking a strongly resistant tone. Each contributes in some way to an analysis of social work in neoliberal times, which, while subdued, has not given up on its ideals or meaning. While there is no clear consensus about how to respond to neoliberalism, there is growing frustration and disillusionment with its claims, which raises the possibility of social work's rejuvenation. In part, and for some contributors, responding to neoliberal hegemony through social work, requires a more thorough examination of the profession's own project, and of the way in which it sees and structures itself under contemporary capitalism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

SYTIREVINUNIKADE

Memorandum

Human Ethics Advisory Group – Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences

221

Burwood Highway,

Burwood Victoria 3125 Australia Telephone +61 3 2517174 Facsimile +61 3 9251 7425
hbsethic@deakin.edu.au

To Professor Bob Pease Date 2 March, 20 School of Health and Social Development

From Secretary – HEAG-H Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing, and Behavior

HEAG-H 15_ 2011: been interpellated by neoliberalism and what is the possibility of resistance?

Doing Neoliberal Social Work: Has social work in Australia

The application supervised by Professor Bob Pease has been considered by the HEAG-H members, and **recommended for approval subject to clarification** of the listed issues:

Procedure:

(i) Do you intend to recruit participants from Deakin University? If so how will you protect their privacy?

(ii) Interviews are not anonymous, but can only be confidential. Please outline what actions will be taken to ensure the data collected remains confidential.

(iii) Please provide a list of questions or topics to be covered in the interviews.

(iv) Will the interviews be audio-recorded? If so, the PLS and consent forms should state this.

(v) Please note that data should be stored for six years from the date of publication.

(vi) Please correct the spelling and grammar in the PLS and introductory letter.

(vii) Please complete the Victorian privacy supplement at http://www.deakin.edu.au/hmnbs/research/ethics/ethicssubmissionprocess.php

Plain Language Statement:

(i) The PLS should, as a minimum, include an explicit invitation to participate within the first two paragraphs, the Deakin Logo, the Deakin complaint clause, and the name and contact details of your supervisor. Please review an example of a PLS and consent form at http://www.deakin.edu.au/hmnbs/research/ethics/ethicssubmissionprocess.php Please resubmit a revised PLS and consent form.

(ii) Is John Wallace enrolled in a PhD or Master of Social Work? Please ensure the correct course is listed.

(iii) Please note if a participant withdraws data cannot be destroyed but must not be used. Please correct.

(iv) Please include the complaint clause:
If you have any complaints about any aspect of the research, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a participant then you may contact **Secretary HEAG-H, Dean's Office, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, 221 Burwood Hwy, Burwood, VIC 3125,** Telephone: (03) 92....., Email **hmnbs-research@deakin.edu.au**. Please quote project number HEAG-H 15/2011.

Miscellaneous:

(i) Please note for future reference that the supervisor should be listed as a CI on the NEAF application form. The applicants should address the issues listed requiring clarification (above), point by point, in a covering letter. The letter and any requested documentation should be submitted to Steven Sawyer, HEAG-H Secretary, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing, & Behavioural Sciences, Burwood Campus. Please note that the letter should be signed by the applicants.

Submitted information and clarifications will be considered by HEAG-H as soon as it is received. This correspondence DOES NOT provide researchers with authority to commence their project. Formal written notification to commence the research/sampling will be provided, once all issues have been addressed to the satisfaction of the HEAG-H.

Steven Sawyer Secretary HEAG-H

Cc John Wallace

APPENDIX 2

Plain Language Statement

Project Title: Doing Neoliberal Social Work: Has social work in Australia been interpellated by neoliberalism and what is the possibility of resistance?

I'm seeking your involvement in a research project investigating whether social work in Australia has become interpellated by neoliberalism and the possibility of resistance. This research project forms part of the requirements of a Master of Social Work I am undertaking at Deakin University.

Description:

The research intersects with several major areas of debate and contention surrounding neoliberalism. In the literature there is evidence of diverse interpretations of the nature and impact of neoliberalism as well as competing understandings of the impact of neoliberalism on social work and a variety of interpretations on the possibility of resistance.

Using an Institutional Ethnographic approach, involving interviews and documents, the research seeks to explore the knowledge and experience of social work educators and aims to uncover the social organization of knowledge that frames social work in the context of neoliberalism.

Benefits of the study:

The study will contribute to an understanding of the impact of neoliberalism within and upon social work in Australia and to provide evidence of the possibility of resistance to neoliberalism.

It will also provide an opportunity for social work educators to explore their experiences and understandings of neoliberalism and social work and to make these visible.

What would be expected of participants:

As a Professors or Course Coordinators of social work you are invited to outline your experiences and understandings of the interpellation of social work by neoliberalism and the possibility of resistance through a process of semi-structured interviews.

Interviews will be audio-recorded.

As a participant, you will be afforded the opportunity to read, edit and authenticate transcripts.

You will be required to complete a formal consent form to participate in the research.

Discomforts and or risks:

There are no specific risks associated with this study.

Confidentiality:

The research forms part of the requirements of a Master of Social Work at Deakin University and all data and report findings will remain the property of the university

The confidentiality of participants is assured and data gathered will be coded to remain non-identifiable to particular individuals or universities. No identification of individuals or universities will be made in the research findings.

All data will be kept confidential in secure files at Deakin University with access only available to the researcher.

All data will be stored securely at Deakin University for a period of six (6) years.

As a participant, a copy of the research report will be made available to you upon completion of the project.

Your Participation:

I would be grateful if you would be available to participate in the study, but you are free to refuse and may withdraw from the research at any time. Should you withdraw all record relating your involvement will not be used as part of the research project?

You will have the opportunity to read and edit all transcripts of interview and may add additional information should you so desire.

Results of the study:

A copy of the final thesis will be made available to you and you are welcome to discuss the outcomes of the research with the author.

Person to contact:

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the principal researcher John Wallace on 04..... or email, jwallace@deakin.edu.au

The supervisor for the project is Professor Bob Pease, Deakin University Ph.: 52....., email bob.pease@deakin.edu.au

If you have any complaints about any aspect of the research, the way it is being conducted or any questions about your rights as a participant then you may contact the secretary HEAG_H, Dean's Office, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, 221 Burwood Highway, Burwood, VIC 3125, Telephone: (03) 92....., Email hmnbs-research@deakin.edu.au. Please quote project number HEAG-H 15/2011jwallace@deakin.edu.au

John Wallace

Master of Social Work Student

Deakin University

APPENDIX 3

Consent Form

Project Title: ***Doing Neoliberal Social Work: Has social work in Australia been interpellated by neoliberalism and what is the possibility of resistance?***

Principal Investigator: John Wallace

Supervisor: Professor Bob Pease

I, as a participant in this research project understand what is expected of me and agree to participate on that basis.

I as a participant in this research project

- have received and read a copy of the *Plain Language Statement*
- have been given an adequate explanation of the likely effects, risks and possible discomforts in participating in this research project and accept those risks
- am aware that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without reason and that data relevant to me will be destroyed.
- am aware and satisfied with the confidentiality arrangements that will safeguard all information subject to any legal limitations.
- understand that neither I nor the university with whom I am employed will be identified in any publication.

Signed: ……. Date ……. Participant

Signed ……. Date …… Investigator

APPENDIX 4

14th September 2011

Dear Professor

I'm seeking your involvement in a research project investigating whether social work in Australia is becoming interpellated by neoliberalism and what is the possibility of resistance? This project forms part of the undertakings for a Master of Social Work at Deakin University.

I am seeking to interview Professors and or Course Coordinators of Social Work or their delegate from Australian Universities on the eastern seaboard to gather the knowledge and experiences of social work educators regarding neoliberalism and social work.

I will also be exploring documentary sources as part of the project.

The research is not seeking to identify particular individuals or universities and as such no information gathered will be identifiable to either a particular academic or their university.

I envisage conducting interviews during the second half of 2011and first half of 2012.

I have attached an outline of the project, a plain language statement and a consent form for your perusal.

If you should have any questions please feel free to contact me at, **jwallace@deakin.edu.au** or ph.: 04....., or my supervisor, Professor Bob Pease, **bob.pease@deakin.edu.au** or ph.: 52.....

I hope you are able to participate in the research.

Regards,

John Wallace,

Student, Master of Social Work,

Deakin University

APPENDIX 5

Briefing paper: Doing Neoliberal Social Work: Has social work in Australia been interpellated by neoliberalism and what is the possibility of resistance?

Researcher: John Wallace, Master of Social Work Student, Deakin University.

Project Supervisor: Professor Bob Pease, Chair in Social Work, Deakin University.

This research project arises from a personal interest in critical social welfare history and a growing unease with the rapid and wide scale impact of neo-liberalism in Australia, particularly with regard to social work

A brief exploration of the literature on neo-liberalism further fuelled my interest, particularly the wide ranging interpretations of both the nature and processes of neo-liberalism.

What also became clear was that, while there was considerable debate in the literature about neo-liberalism and social work, the wide variety of interpretations of neo-liberalism in the broader literature was less evident. It also became apparent that research specific to neo-liberalism and social work in Australia was under explored.

Harris & White (2009) highlight two alternate readings of social work's position in relation to neo-liberalism. The first identifies neo-liberalism as "indelibly *inscribed* on the consciousness of social workers" (Harris & White 2099:170)

They provide an alternate view that social work is interpellated by neo-liberalism.

The bulk of research on social work and neo-liberalism in Australia has focused on the former.

Harris and White's (2009) highlight how individuals are recruited to subject positions through a process of interpellation Contemporary interpretations of interpellation highlight the opportunity for degrees of interpellation that enliven the possibility of agency by those being hailed.

This research project, drawing on critical theory, aims to explore the multiple interpretations of neo-liberalism from respondents and the literature, to add to critical knowledge about neo-liberalism and social work, and in consort to consider the possibility of resistance to neo-liberalism by social work in the Australian context.

Not only will the research draw upon the theoretical considerations of neo-liberalism, but also upon the conceptualizations of interpellation or 'hailing', to explore the impact of neo-liberalism within social work, rather than on social work

The research questions are:

> *Has social work in Australia been interpellated by neo-liberalism and what is the possibility of resistance?*

Using an institutional ethnographic approach (Smith 2005) this research explores the understandings and experiences of social work educators and the textural meeting grounds between social work and the new neoliberal social institutions.

Using semi-structured interviews with approximately 20 social work educators, (professors of social work or course coordinators), a range of topics to explore respondents' knowledge and experience of neo-liberalism and the possibility of resistance for social work in Australia.

Interviews will be, audio recorded for the purposes of accuracy and transcribed with individual respondents having the opportunity to add to and correct transcriptions.

The group of respondents has been chosen for the breadth and depth of their knowledge about the topic and the range of lived experiences of neo-liberalism and social work considered available to them.

Interviews are planned for the latter part of 2011 and the first half of 2012.

Analysis will follow themes developed in relation to the set of topics discussed and will use both the expressed responses of individuals, and literary considerations, be they academic literature or documentary evidences of neo-liberalism and social work

Given the potentially contentious nature of the issue, and the recognizable nature of such a small and prominent group of respondents, all responses will remain confidential and individual respondents and universities will not be identified as part of the research findings

It is expected that findings will provide a broad range of experiences, theoretical considerations and possibilities for resistance. It is hoped this will have specific benefit in developing new ways of responding to neo-liberalism's call and contribute to the possibilities for social work in the new social context.

Harris, J. and White, V. (2009) 'Intensification, Individualisation, Inconvenience, Interpellation', in J. Harris and V. White (eds.) *Modernising Social Work: Critical Considerations.*, Policy Press, Bristol.

Smith, D. (2005) *Institutional ethnography: A Sociology for People.*, Alta Mira Press, Toronto.

APPENDIX 6

General Interview Questions:

1. In your view, how has neoliberalism impacted on social work in Australia?
2. To what extent do you think social work has become part of the neoliberal project?
3. How has your social work program responded to the rise of neoliberalism?
4. What do you see as the possibility of resistance to neoliberalism by social work in Australia?

APPENDIX 7

Submission for conversion to PhD

Social Work in Neoliberal Times:

Accommodation, Disruption and Resistance

Student: John Wallace, Student, Master of Social Work, Deakin University

Supervisor: Bob Pease, Professor of Social Work, Deakin University

Contents:

APPENDIX 8

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

Graduate Research Office

Your University of Tasmania ID Number: 420659

Acceptance of Offer

Mr John David Wallace

Course Code:	R9D	**Course Title:**	Doctor of Philosophy (Society and Culture)
Attendance:	Part Time	**Campus:**	Hobart (External)
Course Code:	X5A	**Course Title:**	Graduate Certificate in Research

Research Topic: Social Work in Neoliberal Times: Accommodation, Survival, Resistance and Disruption

To accept your offer please indicate your start date, read the declaration below, sign and return the form to graduate.research@utas.edu.au.

On what date will you commence? 1 / 10 / 15 (Can be no later than **21 November 2015**)

*Please note that as a research candidate you are able to commence your program at any time up to **21 November 2015** as long as you have school approval. Please confirm your planned date of commencement when completing the 'Acceptance of Offer' section of this document.*

The University of Tasmania collects, stores, and uses personal information, including student images, for the purposes of:

- administration of the student's enrolment and progress in their study;
- the provision of other services to the student by the University; and
- to comply with the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

All information and images are collected and stored on a secure server; only accessed by University staff for the purposes for which they have been collected; and will only be used or disclosed in accordance with the University of Tasmania Privacy Policy.

I understand that:

- I have the right to access my personal information held by the University in accordance with the *Right to Information Act 2009* (Tas);
- I am responsible for ensuring my enrolment is correct for the duration of my candidature;
- I agree to pay all fees, levies and charges within the specified timelines;
- I will receive information and notices in relation to my course of study or general information via my University e-mail account;
- I am required to abide by the University Ordinances, Rules, Policies and Procedures, as well as the Procedures of Graduate Research;
- I am aware of the conditions under which I can use the University's Information Technology facilities and I accept responsibility to obtain and read the relevant documents;
- I consent to the provision of my personal details as required by law to government departments (Commonwealth and State Agencies), statutory bodies and other institutions involved in the delivery of my course of study;
- I authorise the University of Tasmania to obtain official records from any educational institution I have attended to enable my application to be considered. Where necessary QualSearch will be engaged to access this academic information. I understand that the University of Tasmania is not responsible if any educational body/institution does not supply these records. I understand that the results of the search will be made available to me on request and that an audit of this authority may also be undertaken;
- I acknowledge I have read and understood the University's Privacy Policy; and
- I declare to the best of my knowledge and belief the information given in this form is correct and complete in every detail.

I accept this offer for the Doctor of Philosophy (Society and Culture) and Graduate Certificate in Research, and I have read and agree to the terms of the declaration above.

Signed: _____ Date: 24.9.15

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